

Respiratory Syncytial Virus

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a common virus that causes infections of the respiratory system.

Infections caused by RSV include **upper respiratory tract infections** ("colds"), **bronchiolitis** (infection of the lung passages), and pneumonia. Respiratory syncytial virus spreads from person to person when someone who is infected coughs or sneezes, allowing the virus to be carried to other people on droplets of saliva or mucus. In the United States, RSV infection is most common from late fall to early spring.

Young children, especially babies younger than 1 year, have the highest risk of getting RSV infection. Children are often exposed to RSV outside the home, especially at school or day care. However, RSV infection can happen at any age. Very young and very old people and people with a weakened immune system can develop severe infection. You can get RSV even if you have had this virus in the past.

Symptoms of RSV

Most people with RSV start having symptoms about 3 to 7 days after being exposed. Common symptoms include fever, runny nose or nasal congestion, cough, chest congestion, wheezing, and difficulty breathing. Rarely, infants with RSV infection may have periods during which they stop breathing (**apneas**).

Diagnosis of RSV

Diagnosis of RSV is usually based on clinical symptoms. However, there are special tests to detect the virus using a swab that is placed through the nose to the back of the throat. These tests are used mostly in hospitals and emergency departments.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for RSV, and antibiotics are not helpful for this infection. There are medications that can help relieve symptoms (like acetaminophen for fever or albuterol for wheezing), but there are no specific medications that work against the virus. Most people's symptoms improve within 1 to 2 weeks. In severe cases, patients may need to be hospitalized for a short time.

Preventing RSV Infection

People who have RSV (or any other cold-like symptoms) should cover their coughs and sneezes and wash their hands frequently. Do not

share cups or utensils and avoid kissing others who are not sick. Be especially carefully around people with weak immune systems. Research is being done to make a vaccine to prevent RSV.

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) infection

RSV spreads easily by contact with infected droplets of saliva or mucus.



Highest-risk populations

Young children, especially babies younger than 1 year
People with weakened immune systems

Symptoms

Begin 3 to 7 days after exposure

Fever	Wheezing
Runny nose or nasal congestion	Difficulty breathing
Chest congestion	Cough

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for RSV infections. Symptoms usually improve within 1 to 2 weeks. **Antibiotics are not helpful for RSV infections.**

Fluids

Medications to relieve fever or treat other symptoms, such as wheezing

Prevention

Cover coughs and sneezes.



Wash hands frequently.



Do not share cups or utensils.



Avoid contact with people who have a cold.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/rsv

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