

Respiratory syncytial (sin-city-al) virus (RSV) is a common virus that causes respiratory infections and is a frequent cause of the common cold.

RSV can affect people of all ages. Most cases of RSV are mild and can be treated with rest at home. Most children aged under two years have been infected by RSV at some stage, and it is possible to get RSV over and over again. It can occasionally cause more serious infection in young or premature infants. It is more common in the winter months.

What are the signs and symptoms?

After exposure to the virus, symptoms may develop around five days later. RSV in children is normally associated with mild to moderate cold-like symptoms, which generally last between eight and 15 days.

RSV is a common cause of bronchiolitis and pneumonia in children under one year old.

How is RSV spread?

RSV spreads either via direct contact (e.g. hands that have been sneezed on and not washed) or by being coughed or sneezed on by someone who has the infection. RSV is very contagious and can live on surfaces for several hours, and on unwashed hands for 30–60 minutes.

It can be difficult to stop the spread of RSV; however, practicing good hygiene will help avoid passing any virus onto others. Children with RSV are usually infectious (able to pass the virus onto others) for eight days from the start of their symptoms.

Prevention

There is currently no vaccine to prevent RSV, and no specific treatment other than supportive care while the immune system controls the virus.

- **Avoid exposure.** If you are feeling unwell with symptoms that resemble a cold or flu (e.g. runny nose, cough, sore throat, fever, muscle aches) please discuss with staff before visiting the unit.
- **Wash your hands frequently.** Teach your family the importance of hand-washing. Alcohol gel is effective at killing the virus on hands.
- **Keep things clean.** Make sure kitchen and bathroom countertops are clean. Discard used tissues right away.
- **Don't share drinking glasses with others.** Use your own glass or disposable cups when you or someone else is sick. Label each person's cup.
- **Don't smoke.** Babies who are exposed to tobacco smoke have a higher risk of getting RSV and potentially more-severe symptoms. If you do smoke, never do so inside the house or car.