

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

Date:

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your child may have been exposed to **respiratory syncytial virus (also called RSV)** while at child care.

What is RSV?

RSV is a major cause of respiratory illness among individuals in all age groups. Infection usually causes cold symptoms, but in about 25% to 40% of cases in infants and younger children, RSV infection spreads to the lungs and may lead to bronchiolitis (inflammation of the small airways in the lungs) and pneumonia.

What are the symptoms of RSV?

Children and infants who are infected often have a runny nose and a decrease in appetite before any other symptoms appear. A cough usually develops 1 to 3 days later. Soon after the cough develops, sneezing, fever, and wheezing can occur. In very young infants, decreased activity, poor feeding, irritability, and breathing problems might be the only symptoms.

How serious is RSV?

Most infants and children recover from RSV in 1-2 weeks. A very small percentage of children require hospitalization. (Adults usually recover from RSV in less than 5 days.)

How does a person get RSV?

RSV is highly contagious and can be spread when droplets containing the virus are sneezed or coughed into the air. RSV can live on inanimate objects (such as cribs, door knobs, or table tops) for many hours. Infection can be easily spread when a person gets the virus on her/his hands while touching a contaminated object, then touches her/his eyes, nose, or mouth.

How long does it take to come down with RSV after a person is exposed?

Symptoms appear 2-8 days (usually 4-6) after a child is exposed to the virus.

When is a person with RSV contagious?

A person with RSV is usually able to spread the infection for 3-8 days or the duration of the illness. In some cases, however, the virus continues to be shed for up to 3-4 weeks.

How can I help prevent the spread of RSV?

- Wash hands well and often with soap and water, especially after wiping a nose or touching oral or nasal secretions.
- Clean, rinse, and sanitize toys and surfaces regularly at child care (especially mouthed toys).
- Do not expose children to cigarette smoke, because it can worsen the symptoms of RSV.

What is the treatment for RSV?

The illness usually gets better on its own without any treatment. Sometimes physicians may prescribe medications for severe symptoms. Preventive injections are available for certain infants at high risk for severe RSV, including some babies born prematurely and those with certain chronic lung or heart disease.

If my child develops RSV, must s/he stay away from child care?

Children with severe respiratory illness or fever should not attend child care until all symptoms have resolved.

