**Respiratory Syncytial Virus Infection (RSV)**

The “RSV” or Respiratory Syncytial (sin-SISH-uhl) Virus is a common respiratory virus that usually causes mild, cold-like symptoms. RSV can be serious, especially for infants and older adults.

RSV is the most common cause of bronchiolitis (inflammation of the small airways in the lung) and pneumonia (infection of the lungs) in children younger than 1 year of age in the United States.

People are typically infected with RSV for the first time as an infant or toddler and nearly all children are infected before their second birthday. However, repeat infections may occur throughout life, and people of any age can be infected. Infections in healthy children and adults are generally less severe than among infants and older adults with certain medical conditions. People at highest risk for severe disease include:

- Premature infants
- Young children with congenital (from birth) heart or chronic lung disease
- Young children with compromised (weakened) immune systems due to a medical condition or medical treatment
- Children with neuromuscular disorders
- Adults with compromised immune systems
- Older adults, especially those with underlying heart or lung disease

In the United States and other areas with similar climates, RSV circulation generally starts during fall and peaks in the winter.

**What are the symptoms?**

People infected with RSV usually show symptoms within 4 to 6 days after getting infected. Symptoms of RSV infection usually include:

- Runny nose
- Decrease in appetite
- Coughing
- Sneezing
- Fever
- Wheezing

**How is RSV spread to others?**

- An infected person coughs or sneezes
- You get virus droplets from a cough or sneeze in your eyes, nose, or mouth
- You have direct contact with the virus, like kissing the face of a child with RSV
- You touch a surface that has the virus on it, like a doorknob, and then touch your face before washing your hands
People infected with RSV are usually contagious for 3 to 8 days and may become contagious a day or two before they start showing signs of illness. However, some infants, and people with weakened immune systems, can continue to spread the virus even after they stop showing symptoms, for as long as 4 weeks. Children are often exposed to and infected with RSV outside the home, such as in school or childcare centers. They can then transmit the virus to other members of the family.

**Prevention?**

There are steps you can take to help prevent the spread of RSV. Specifically, if you have cold-like symptoms you should:

- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your upper shirt sleeve, not your hands
- **Wash your hands** often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- Avoid close contact, such as kissing, shaking hands, and sharing cups and eating utensils, with others
- Clean frequently touched surfaces such as doorknobs and mobile devices

**Care?**

Most RSV infections go away on their own in a week or two. There is no specific treatment for RSV infection, though researchers are working to develop vaccines and antivirals (medicines that fight viruses).

Take these steps to relieve symptoms:

- Manage fever and pain with over-the-counter fever reducers and pain relievers, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. (Never give aspirin to children.)
- Drink enough fluids. It is important for people with RSV infection to drink enough fluids to prevent dehydration (loss of body fluids).
- Talk to your healthcare provider before giving your child nonprescription cold medicines. Some medicines contain ingredients that are not good for children.

**Where can I get more information?**

- Your doctor, nurse or clinic.
- The Macomb County Health Department Communicable Disease Surveillance Program at (586) 783-8190.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov) and search the “A-Z Index” in blue at the top of the page.