



Durham Region Health Department **Facts about...**



Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

What is it?

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) is a major cause of upper and lower respiratory illness, particularly among infants, young children, and older adults, affecting the lungs and airways (nose and throat). It may cause cold-like symptoms and is the most common cause of chest infections that affect infants and toddlers. Most children will have at least one RSV infection by the age of 2. The infection is most severe in young babies and older adults and can cause serious lung infections that may require hospitalization.

Globally, it has been estimated that RSV is associated with about 31% of pneumonia (lung infection) cases and 33 million episodes of acute lower respiratory tract (lung) infections. In Canada, approximately 2% of all infants are hospitalized with RSV in their first year of life. In some remote communities, RSV hospitalization rates can be as high as 5 to 17% for all live births.

What are common symptoms of RSV?

- Coughing
- Runny nose
- Sneezing
- Fever
- Wheezing
- A decrease in appetite and energy
- Irritability and difficulty breathing in children

How is it spread?

- RSV spreads mostly through coughing and sneezing. It can also be spread by touching a surface that has the RSV virus and then touching your mouth, eyes, or nose.
- After exposure to the virus, it can take 2 to 8 days before becoming sick. Children are often exposed to and infected with RSV outside the home, such as in school or childcare centres, and can then transmit the virus to other members of the family.

How to protect yourself and others from RSV

- Clean your hands often using soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

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If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.



- When you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue (and throw out) or your upper sleeve.
- Keep common surfaces and items clean and disinfected.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Families with infants and high-risk children up to 24 months, pregnant individuals, and individuals 60 years of age and older may be eligible for a single dose of an RSV product. Discuss this option with your health care provider.
 - See [Facts About...Respiratory Syncytial Virus \(RSV\) Vaccines](#).

How is it treated?

- Most RSV infections typically resolve by themselves within one to two weeks.
- Symptoms may be managed at home:
 - Over-the-counter fever reducers and pain relievers, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Consult your doctor about giving ibuprofen to babies under 6 months old and **do not** give aspirin to children.
 - Drink enough fluids to prevent dehydration.
 - Speak to your health care provider before giving your child non-prescription cold medicines.
- RSV can cause severe illness in some individuals. Call a health care professional if you or your child is having difficulty waking, breathing or has signs of dehydration, is not drinking enough fluids, or is experiencing any worsening symptoms.

August 22, 2024