

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

What do I need to know?

Since the start of the pandemic, the infection control and hygiene measures that have helped us to fight COVID-19 have also reduced the circulation of other respiratory infections, such as Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV). Many babies and young children will not yet have been exposed to these common viruses. As restrictions are eased, cases of these viruses are rising, so parents are advised to look out for signs of severe respiratory infection in their children.

What is RSV?

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) is one of the common viruses that cause coughs and colds in winter. Most cases are not serious and clear up in 2-3 weeks, but it can be severe in some infants. RSV is the most common cause of bronchiolitis in children aged under 2 years. Bronchiolitis is an infection which causes the smallest airways in the lungs (the bronchioles) to become infected and inflamed.

Who is at risk?

- Babies and young children under 2 years old
- preschool children
- older people

RSV can be more severe in:

- premature babies
- newborn babies, especially in the first 2 months
- vulnerable infants with certain underlying conditions



What are the symptoms?

In babies, the symptoms of RSV can be:

- irritability
- poor feeding
- lethargy
- low grade fever
- fast breathing or difficulty breathing
- wheezing

In children, you may see:

- runny nose
- decreased appetite
- cough
- sneezing
- fever



What should I do if my child has symptoms?

Mild symptoms such as fever and discomfort can be managed at home. Depending on their age you may be able to give them paracetamol or ibuprofen if their fever is upsetting them. Always follow the dosage instructions on the packaging. Make sure they drink plenty of fluids. Your baby may be more comfortable when held or sitting upright.

For more information on bronchiolitis go to www.nidirect.gov.uk/conditions/bronchiolitis

Symptoms of severe respiratory infection in children include a high temperature of 37.8°C or above (fever), a dry and persistent cough, difficulty feeding, rapid or noisy breathing (wheezing). Most cases of respiratory illness are not serious and clear up within 2 to 3 weeks, but you should contact your GP for advice.

Call 999 for an ambulance if:

- your baby is having difficulty breathing
- their lips or tongue are turning blue, or
- there are long pauses between breaths

How can I reduce the risk of RSV?

Good respiratory and hand hygiene can reduce the spread of infections.

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water regularly, or use hand sanitiser if you're out and about.
- Avoid touching your or your child's face.
- Carry tissues and use them to catch coughs and sneezes. Bin the tissues as soon as possible, then wash or sanitise your and your child's hands.
- Keep surfaces clean.

Children with coughs, colds, flu or bronchiolitis symptoms should stay at home and reduce contacts, even if they have had a negative COVID-19 test.

It is perfectly ok for parents to ask people with coughs or colds to keep away from newborn babies, even if they have had a negative COVID-19 test. This is particularly important in the first 2 months after birth and for babies born prematurely.

For more information visit: pha.site/RSV-QandA