



Pediatric Clinic
PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUTS
**RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS
(RSV): A GUIDE FOR PARENTS**

WHAT IS RSV?

RSV stands for Respiratory Syncytial Virus. It is the most frequent cause of serious respiratory tract infections in infants and children younger than 4 years of age. This is such a common virus that most all children have been infected by RSV by the age of 2. In most young children, it results in a mild lung infection that is very much like a common cold.

WHAT TIME OF YEAR DOES RSV HAPPEN MOST OFTEN?

RSV can happen any time of the year, but it happens most often in the winter months (November - March).

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF RSV?

The nose gets stuffy and might have a runny discharge, there might be a cough or ear infection. It usually does not require a clinic or hospital evaluation or any other treatment, even in the many children whose chest/lungs are involved. The symptoms can also include a low fever for several days, runny nose or congestion that may last for 1 to 2 weeks, and a cough that sometimes lasts longer than 2 weeks.

CAN RSV BE SERIOUS?

An infant or young child less than 5 years old who is experiencing his or her first RSV infection may get an infection in the lungs that might require hospitalization. Most commonly, newborns, young infants, and children with conditions like congenital heart or lung disease or prematurity are more likely to need to be admitted to the hospital. Call your pediatrician or family doctor if you have concerns.

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY CHILD HAS A SERIOUS RSV INFECTION?

A child who develops signs of difficult breathing like wheezing, fast breathing or deeper and more frequent coughing, and who acts sicker (looks and/or acts more tired), is less playful, and less interested in food, may have developed a more serious RSV infection.

WHEN SHOULD I CALL THE DOCTOR OR NURSE CARE LINE?

Call your doctor or the nurse care line if you are worried about your child. The health provider will decide with you whether the symptoms and behavior you describe mean that your baby should be seen in the doctor's office. If the symptoms interfere with your baby's sleeping or drinking

or if your baby appear to have difficult or quick breathing, you should call your physician. If your child:

- a) is younger than 1 year of age,
- b) has a disease such as heart disease or lung disease, and/or
- c) was premature with lung disease that developed after birth

you should let your doctor know whenever the baby develops a severe respiratory infection.

IF MY CHILD GETS A RSV INFECTION, HOW WILL IT BE TREATED?

For most children, the RSV infection is over in its own course of time, but some children may need intravenous (IV) fluids and/or oxygen treatment. Contact your doctor if you have any questions.

WHERE DOES RSV COME FROM AND HOW CAN I PREVENT MY CHILD FROM BEING INFECTED?

Children and adults of all ages can become infected several times in their lifetimes. The infection in older children and adults may be mild, with cold-like symptoms. A person becomes infected by coming in close contact with another infected person. The germ is passed through the air by coughing, sneezing, talking or touching. An infant can get the infection from close contact with an older family member who may have only mild cold-like symptoms.

It is not possible to try to prevent the normal child from being exposed to the RSV infection. When a family member is infected, extra care should be taken by washing hands often to prevent the spread of RSV from used tissues and other objects such as toys.

CAN MY CHILD GET RSV AGAIN?

Anyone can get a second RSV infection. However, the symptoms are usually milder than those experienced with the first RSV infection.

WILL RSV WEAKEN MY CHILD'S LUNGS AND MAKE HIM MORE LIKELY TO GET PNEUMONIA IN THE FUTURE?

Most children recover completely from RSV. They will react to cold or respiratory infections with no more difficulty. A few children appear to be more likely to get respiratory problems later. This may be due to some other medical conditions or allergies.