
Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

Description: RSV causes infections of the upper respiratory tract (like a cold) and the lower respiratory tract (like pneumonia). It is the most frequent cause of lower respiratory infections, including pneumonia, in infants and children under 2 years of age.

Almost 100 percent of children in child care get RSV in the first year of their life, usually during outbreaks during the winter months.

Symptoms: In most children, symptoms appear similar to a mild cold. About half of the infections result in lower respiratory tract infections and otitis media. An RSV infection can range from very mild to life threatening or even fatal. Children with heart or lung disease and weak immune systems are at increased risk of developing severe infection and complications. RSV causes repeated symptomatic infections throughout life.

How it is Spread: RSV is spread through direct contact with infectious secretions such as by breathing them in after an infected person has coughed or by touching a surface contaminated by infected person.

Incubation period: 1-10 days.

How Long Can a Person Pass the Infection to Others? A young child with RSV may be infectious for one to three weeks after symptoms subside.

Responsibility of Parents and Caregivers: The most effective preventive measure against the spread of RSV infections and other respiratory viral infections is careful and frequent hand washing. Once one child in a group is infected with RSV, spread to others is rapid. Frequently, a child is infectious before symptoms appear. Therefore, an infected child does not need to be excluded from child care unless he or she is not well enough to participate in usual activities.

Control: If a child or adult in the child care facility develops an illness caused by RSV infection:

- Make sure procedures regarding hand washing, hygiene, disposal of tissues used to clean nasal secretions and cleaning and sanitation of toys are followed.
- Do not allow children to share cups, utensils, glasses.
- If multiple cases occur, grouping or separating ill children from well/recovered children may help to reduce the spread of RSV. Do not exclude ill children unless they are unable to participate comfortably in activities or require a level of care that would jeopardize the health and safety of the other children in your care.

Treatment: For children with mild disease, no specific treatment is necessary other than the treatment of symptoms. Children with severe disease may require hospitalization.