

# RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS

## PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

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### *What is Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)?*

*RSV can cause infection of the upper respiratory tract (like a cold) and the lower respiratory tract (like pneumonia). It is the most common cause of lower respiratory infection, including pneumonia, in infants and children under two years of age. Almost all children are infected at least once by two years of age and re-infection throughout life is common.*

### **How is it spread?**

RSV is spread through direct and indirect contact with respiratory secretions of infected persons. Direct contact occurs when a person breathes in respiratory droplets that are in the air after an infected person coughs or sneezes. Indirect contact occurs when a person touches any surface or item contaminated with the nose and throat secretions of someone with RSV. Symptoms of RSV infection can range from mild to life threatening. Children experiencing heart, lung or immune system disorders are at increased risk of complications from RSV infection. Symptoms of RSV can develop 2-8 days after exposure to the virus; 4-6 days is most common. A young child with RSV may be infectious for up to three weeks after symptoms subside.

### **How is it treated?**

Primary treatment is supportive and should include relief of symptoms and rest. Children with severe disease or immune compromised children may require specialized therapy. Please consult your doctor.

### **How can we prevent RSV?**

- The most effective measure is frequent handwashing and covering coughs and sneezes.
- Do not share drinking glasses or eating utensils.
- Avoid exposure to tobacco smoke.
- (A vaccine against RSV is not yet available.)

### **SYMPTOMS OF RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS**

- fever
- runny nose
- lethargy
- cough
- sometimes wheezing

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