

# What is RSV?

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022), RSV “is a common respiratory virus that usually causes mild, cold-like symptoms.” Although most people can recover from RSV within “a week or two”, RSV can pose serious risks for “children under the age of one, premature infants, children younger than 2 years old with chronic lung disease or congenital (present from birth) heart disease, children with weakened immune systems, and children who have neuromuscular disorders, including those who have difficulty swallowing or clearing mucus secretions (RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) 2022).” Children under the age of one are more at risk for developing a more serious condition due to their small, still developing airways. More serious conditions include “bronchiolitis (inflammation of the small airways in the lung) and pneumonia (infection of the lungs) (RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) 2022).” Early symptoms of RSV can include “runny nose, decrease in appetite, and a cough which may progress to wheezing or difficulty breathing (RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) 2022).” The CDC explains that children who get an RSV infection “almost always show symptoms” and in very young children, symptoms may present as “irritability, decreased activity, decreased appetite, and apnea (pauses in breathing more than 10 seconds (RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) 2022).” While there is no vaccine yet to prevent an RSV infection, the CDC explains that caregivers can take steps to limit exposure for children who are at high risk for severe RSV infection, including “washing hands often, keeping hands off face, avoiding close contact with sick people, covering coughs and sneezes, cleaning, and disinfecting surfaces, and staying home when sick (RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) 2022).” Although symptoms can be managed by “taking over-the-counter fever reducers and drinking enough fluids”, some children may be hospitalized “if they are having trouble breathing or are dehydrated (RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) 2022).” A child may require “additional oxygen, or IV fluids (if they can’t eat or drink enough), or intubation (have a breathing tube inserted through the mouth and down to the airway) with mechanical ventilation (a machine to help a person breathe) (RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) 2022).” RSV can lead to more severe infections, which is why it is important to educate caregivers and encourage communication with healthcare providers.