Fact Sheet
Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

WHAT IS RSV?
Respiratory Syncytial Virus or RSV is a respiratory virus that causes mild, cold-like symptoms but can cause more severe symptoms for people with weakened immune systems, infants, and adults 65 years of age or older.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF RSV?
RSV symptoms usually appear within 4 to 6 days after becoming infected. Symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Stuffy or runny nose
- Congestion
- Difficulty breathing
- Coughing
- Sneezing
- Wheezing
- Loss of appetite
- Minor headache

Severe illness among young children may result in bronchiolitis (inflammation of the small airways in the lungs) and pneumonia (infection of the lungs) and even death.

HOW DOES RSV SPREAD?
RSV is very contagious and spreads through droplets of an infected person. You can get RSV if:

- An infected person coughs or sneezes and the droplets get in your eyes, nose or mouth
- You touch a surface that an infected person coughed or sneezed on, and you touch your face before hand washing
- You have direct contact with the virus

HOW LONG ARE RSV INFECTED PERSONS CONTAGIOUS FOR?
People infected with RSV can become contagious up to two days before showing symptoms and typically continue to be contagious for 3-8 days. In some instances, some infants, and people with weakened immune systems, can continue to spread the virus even after they stop showing symptoms, for up to 4 weeks.
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HOW IS RSV TREATED?
Most RSV cases are mild and do not require treatment. There are currently no vaccines or antiviral medications for an RSV infection. In most cases, RSV goes away on its own usually within a week or two. Some steps to relieve symptoms include:

- **Contacting your health care provider:** Talk to your health care provider before giving children nonprescription cold medicines. Some medicines contain ingredients that are not good for children.
- **Supportive Care:** Consider using fever reducing medication and pain relievers such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Never give aspirin to children.
- **Staying Hydrated:** Drink enough fluids to prevent dehydration.

Severe cases usually in older adults and infants may need to be hospitalized if they have trouble breathing.

HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF FROM RSV?
The following steps can be taken to help prevent the spread of RSV:

- Wash your hands with soap and water often
- Do not touch your face unless you have recently washed your hands
- Avoid sharing cups and utensils with others
- Clean and disinfect shared surfaces/ frequently touched surfaces
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or shirt sleeve (avoid using your hands)
- Avoid close contact with people with cold-like symptoms

Palivizumab, an antiviral monoclonal antibody, may be prescribed to premature infants and young children with certain heart and lung conditions during RSV season to help prevent severe illness.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT RSV?

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus) | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/rsv)