

# Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Fact Sheet

## What is RSV?

RSV is the most common cause of lower respiratory tract diseases among infants and young children in the world. It most commonly occurs from late fall to early spring. Almost all children are infected at least once by two years of age. When infants and children are exposed to RSV for the first time, 25-40% will have symptoms of bronchiolitis (inflammation of the small airways in the lung) or pneumonia. About 1% of these children will need hospitalization (usually under 6 months of age). Older people can develop RSV but infection is less severe.

## What are the symptoms?

- Cough
- Runny nose
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Body aches
- Feeling tired

Symptoms usually occur within 4-6 days of infection.

## How is it spread?

It can be spread through the air, when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or by touching a surface on which an infected person has coughed or sneezed. RSV can live on environmental surfaces for many hours and can live for 30 minutes or more on hands. An infected person may be contagious for up to 8 days after the start of the illness.

## What are the serious complications from RSV?

Some children under the age of 3 may develop more serious infections from RSV such as pneumonia or bronchiolitis. Premature infants and children with heart or lung disease or weak immune systems have a greater risk of developing respiratory complications.

## How is it treated?

- Rest and drink plenty of fluids
- If needed, use a non-aspirin product (Tylenol, Advil) to reduce fever and discomfort. Aspirin should not be used in children with viral illnesses; since it has been associated with the development of Reye Syndrome.
- Call your doctor if the symptoms appear to interfere with your child's ability to sleep or drink, or if your child is having difficult or rapid breathing.
- If the doctor prescribes medicine for your child, give all the medicine as directed.
- There is a new drug called palivizumab to prevent severe RSV illness in high-risk infants and children. However, it cannot help cure or treat children already suffering from serious RSV disease.

## How is it prevented?

- Use tissues to catch coughs and sneezes and throw the tissues away in a trash can.
- Wash hands often using soap and water.
- There is currently no vaccine for RSV.
- If a child is at high-risk for developing complications from RSV, they may qualify to use palivizumab as a preventive measure.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information, call your health care provider or call the Bay County Health Dept at (989) 895-4003.

Visit our website at <http://www.baycounty-mi.gov/Health/> or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)