

Respiratory Syncytial Virus

What is RSV?

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a virus that can cause infection of the upper and lower respiratory tracts in people of all ages. The infection can be minor, producing cold-like symptoms or major, resulting in pneumonia or bronchiolitis (inflammation of the small air passages).

How is RSV diagnosed?

There are several laboratory tests that can be done to determine if the illness is RSV.

What are the symptoms?

- Fever
- Clear nasal drainage
- Cough
- Irritability and poor feeding in infants

How is RSV transmitted?

- The virus is spread from person to person through droplets produced during coughing and sneezing or through contact with contaminated surfaces. RSV can survive for hours on surfaces in the environment. If a person's hands come into contact with the contaminated surfaces, they can become infected by rubbing their eyes, nose, or mouth (self inoculation).
- RSV usually occurs during the winter and early spring when epidemics are common.
- The time between exposure to the virus and symptoms of infection is usually 4-6 days.
- Infected persons can usually transmit the virus for 3-8 days; however, in young infants, the period of infectivity may be as long as 3-4 weeks.

Who is at risk?

- Infants and children under 1 year of age:
 - 25%-40% have signs or symptoms of bronchiolitis or pneumonia.
 - Hospitalization occurs in 0.5%-2% of cases, the majority of whom are under 6 months of age.
- Severe lower respiratory tract disease is more likely among the elderly and those with underlying heart or lung disease and weakened immune systems.
- Repeated infection occurs throughout life.

What is the treatment?

- Since RSV is a virus, antibiotics are not used for treatment.
- Persons with severe infection are treated with fluids and oxygen.
- Ribavirin is an antiviral medicine that is recommended for a select group of persons at high risk for serious RSV disease.

How can RSV be prevented?

- The most effective preventive measure is good hand washing.
- Proper disposal of tissues used to clear nasal secretions
- Cleaning and disinfection of toys shared by multiple children
- Since children are infectious before showing signs of RSV, restriction from school or day care will probably not decrease the spread of virus to others.

Is there a vaccine for RSV?

There is currently no vaccine that protects against RSV. However, an immune globulin is available for use with persons at high risk for serious infection with RSV. Immune globulin (not a vaccine) provides antibodies/immunity.

Isolation Requirements in the PICU / NICU

Visitors must follow isolation precaution as indicated by the isolation policy. This includes a gown, gloves and mask when at the child's bedside.

Visitors under the age of 12

During Stage two of RSV season children under the age of 12 will not be allowed to visit the Children's Center (exceptions will be made on a case by case basis).