

# RSV in Babies and Children: Symptoms, Treatment, and Prevention



## Highlights

RSV is a virus that causes infection in the lungs and airways. It is one of the most common causes of respiratory infections in children. Symptoms may include runny nose, cough, sneezing, wheezing, and fever. Diagnosis can be confirmed with a PCR test (swab from the nose or throat). Most cases of RSV are mild and can be treated at home. Babies and children with RSV can experience complications like bronchiolitis, pneumonia, and ear infections.

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### **What is respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)?**

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a virus that causes infection in the lungs and airways. It is one of the most common causes of respiratory infections in children, including the common cold. RSV infections are most common during the winter months.

RSV can affect people of all ages, and most people have had RSV by the time they are 2 years old. It is possible to get RSV multiple times, but immunity after an infection is not long-lasting.

### **What are the symptoms of RSV?**

In most people, RSV causes a mild respiratory illness, with symptoms becoming noticeable around 5 days after exposure. Symptoms may worsen for the first few days, then gradually improve.

Symptoms may include:

- Runny nose
- Cough
- Sneezing
- Wheezing
- Fever

RSV symptoms in young babies may include breathing difficulties, bronchiolitis, or pneumonia. Babies may also have trouble feeding and may become unsettled.

### **What causes RSV?**

RSV is a virus that causes infections in the lungs and airways. Babies and children typically catch RSV from others who are infected.

RSV is highly contagious and can be spread through coughing, sneezing, or sharing cups. The virus can survive on surfaces for several hours and can be passed on by unwashed hands for up to 60 minutes. Practicing good hygiene can

help reduce the spread of the virus.

### **How is RSV diagnosed?**

RSV can be diagnosed through a physical exam and by discussing symptoms. To confirm that RSV is the cause, a doctor may perform a PCR test, which involves taking a swab from the child's nose or throat.

### **How is RSV treated in babies?**

Most mild cases of RSV can be managed at home with rest and hydration. Offering small, frequent feeds can help babies stay hydrated.

If a baby has a fever, paracetamol or ibuprofen (as recommended by a doctor) can help manage symptoms. Babies with pre-existing conditions, severe bronchiolitis, or feeding and breathing difficulties may need hospital care.

For babies under 3 months old with a fever above 38°C, immediate medical attention is required.

### **How is RSV treated in young children?**

Treating young children with RSV follows similar principles to treating babies. It is important to provide fluids frequently and manage fever with appropriate medication. If your child experiences breathing or feeding difficulties, they may need to go to the hospital for care.

### **When should I see my doctor?**

You should take your child to see a doctor if:

- They have a high fever
- They have difficulty feeding or refuse to eat
- Their cough becomes worse
- You are concerned about their breathing

If your child is having difficulty breathing, turning blue, grunting, or appears lethargic, seek immediate medical help.

## **Can RSV be prevented?**

Good hygiene practices, such as regular handwashing, covering coughs and sneezes, and cleaning surfaces, can help prevent RSV. Avoid sharing cups or eating utensils and stay home when feeling unwell.

In some cases, vaccination can provide protection:

Beyfortus (nirsevimab) is approved for high-risk babies and young children.

Palivizumab can provide passive immunity to certain high-risk babies.

Pregnant women can also receive the RSV vaccine, Abrysvo, to help protect their babies.

## **Complications of RSV in babies and children**

RSV can cause serious complications like bronchiolitis, pneumonia, and ear infections. If your child experiences these complications, follow-up care and possibly hospitalization may be necessary.

## **Tools And Assistance**

For more information on RSV and its treatment, you can consult healthcare professionals or visit trusted health resources.