

RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS (RSV)

RSV infection is a common respiratory illness that can affect persons of any age. RSV infections generally occur in the United States from November to April. RSV is the most common cause of bronchiolitis (inflammation of the small airways in the lung) and pneumonia in children under 1 year of age in the United States. Each year, 75,000 to 125,000 children in this age group are hospitalized due to RSV infection. Almost all children are infected with the virus by their second birthday, but only a small percentage develop severe disease. Reinfection is common throughout life.

CAUSE

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms can be similar to a mild cold with low-grade or no fever, cough, watery eyes, runny nose, nasal stuffiness, and sneezing. However, the more severe form includes wheezing, as seen in bronchiolitis and lung congestion, as seen in pneumonia. Infants infected during the first few weeks of life may only show tiredness, irritability, and loss of appetite and may have episodes where they stop breathing for short time periods (apnea) with few other respiratory signs.

RSV infection can be especially serious in infants who were born prematurely or those with heart, lung, or immune system problems. However, severe lower respiratory tract disease may occur at any age, especially in the elderly or those with heart, lung, or immune system problems. You can have more than one RSV infection during your lifetime.

SPREAD

RSV can be spread when droplets containing the virus are sneezed or coughed into the air by an infected person. Such droplets can linger briefly in the air, and if someone inhales the particles or the particles contact their nose, mouth, or eye, they can become infected. Infection can also result from direct and indirect contact with nasal or oral secretions from infected persons. Direct contact with the virus can occur, for example, by kissing the face of a child with RSV. Indirect contact can occur if the virus gets on an environmental surface, such as a doorknob, that is then touched by other people. Direct and indirect transmissions of virus usually occur when people touch an infectious secretion and then rub their eyes or nose. The virus can live on hands for one-half hour or more and on environmental surfaces for several hours.

INCUBATION (time from exposure to onset of symptoms)

2 to 8 days, usually 4 to 6 days

CONTAGIOUS PERIOD

The virus is usually found in respiratory secretions for 3 to 8 days, although some infants can spread RSV for as long as 3 to 4 weeks.

EXCLUSION

Child care and School: Until fever is gone and the child is well enough to participate in routine activities.

DIAGNOSIS

Recommend parents/guardians call their healthcare provider if their child has symptoms of RSV. There is a lab test to detect RSV.

TREATMENT

Infants who are hospitalized may be treated with an antiviral drug. **DO NOT GIVE ASPIRIN or SALICYLATE-CONTAINING MEDICATIONS TO ANY CHILD OR ADOLESCENT UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE.**

PREVENTION/CONTROL

- Cover nose and mouth with tissue when coughing or sneezing or cough/sneeze into your sleeve. Dispose of used tissues.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after contact with secretions from the nose or mouth.
- DO NOT share cups, glasses or eating utensils.
- Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces (door knobs, refrigerator handle, water faucets, cupboard handles) at least daily.
- Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects, and surfaces at least daily and when soiled. Clean and sanitize all dishes and silverware after each use.
- Certain high-risk infants (e.g., premature babies) can be given a medication to prevent infection. Have the parents/guardians talk to their healthcare provider.

For more information please contact Contra Costa Public Health at 925-313-6740 and visit our website at <http://cchealth.org/cd/>