



Central Michigan District Health Department

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“Just The Facts”

RSV

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What is RSV?

RSV stands for Respiratory Syncytial Virus. RSV is the most frequent cause of serious respiratory tract infections in infants and children younger than four years of age. It is such a common virus that most children will be infected by the age of 3. In the majority of children, it results in a mild respiratory infection similar to the common cold.

What are the symptoms of RSV?

RSV causes nasal congestion and discharge, cough, and sometimes ear infection. It usually does not require hospitalization or specific treatment, even in the majority of those who also have lower respiratory symptoms involvement. These children may have a low-grade fever several days, respiratory symptoms that may last 1-2 weeks, and a cough that sometimes persists beyond 2 weeks.

Can RSV be serious?

Yes. An infant or young child experiencing his or her first RSV infection may develop a severe infection in the lower respiratory tract that is best managed in the hospital. Most commonly, newborns, infants, and children with medical complications or underlying conditions such as a depressed immune system, prematurity or congenital heart disease, are more likely to be hospitalized.

How do I know if my child has a serious RSV infection?

A child who develops signs of stressful breathing, deeper and more frequent coughing, and who generally acts sicker by appearing tired, less playful and less interested in food may develop a more serious infection. Only your doctor can tell for sure.

When should I call the doctor?

As in any illness, you should call your pediatrician whenever you are worried about your child. If respiratory symptoms interfere with your baby's ability to sleep or drink, or if the baby appears to have difficult or rapid breathing, you should call your pediatrician.

If my child should get an RSV infection, how is it treated?

The majority of RSV infections are self-limiting and require no specific therapy. Severe symptoms of RSV may call for hospitalization and specific antiviral treatment with ribavirin. Once treated, it is possible for a child to get a second RSV infection, but the symptoms are usually much milder than the first time.

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