



RSV – Respiratory Syncytial Virus

Advice for Parents

By Tara Kelly

When winter is on the way, with it comes cold and 'flu season. RSV affects many babies each year and causes Bronchiolitis, yet many parents have never heard of it. With that in mind IMBA would like to raise awareness and provide parents with information on the symptoms and advice on what to do if you suspect your child has RSV.

RSV is a virus that can cause infections of the lungs and respiratory tract and is very common in children under the age of 2. When this occurs in adults and older, healthy children, the symptoms are usually mild and mimic the common cold.

However, RSV can cause severe infection in premature babies and babies/infants with underlying health conditions. The virus can lead to lower respiratory tract illness such as pneumonia or bronchiolitis (which is an inflammation of the small airway passages entering the lungs), croup, ear infections, and lung failure.

Outbreaks of RSV most often begin in the autumn time and continue into the spring.

Unfortunately RSV spreads easily when secretions from coughing or sneezing are inhaled or passed through direct contact such as kissing or shaking hands. It can also live on toys, door handles and counter-tops. It spreads rapidly in creches, play-groups and schools, so older children could carry the RSV virus into the home.

Signs and symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Severe cough – often a 'croupy' cough which sounds like a seal barking
- Wheezing
- Shortness of breath
- Rapid breathing or difficulty breathing which may make your child prefer to sit up rather than lie down
- Bluish colour of the skin due to lack of oxygen



Infants may markedly draw in their chest muscles and the skin between their ribs, and their breathing may be short, shallow and rapid. They may feed poorly and be unusually lethargic.

Please seek **immediate medical attention** if your child is experiencing difficulty breathing, runs a high temperature or shows a bluish colour on the skin or lips.

Any breathing difficulty in an infant should be considered a medical emergency.

When RSV infection causes severe illness, a hospital stay may be required to provide IV fluids and oxygen and possibly mechanical ventilation. Hospitals can test for RSV by taking a swab from the nose.

Please take the following steps which may help to prevent you and your babies contracting the RSV virus:

- Wash your hands and insist that others wash their hands before touching your babies
- People with a cold or fever should not have contact with your babies
- Remember that kissing can spread RSV from person to person
- Do not smoke
- Try to avoid crowded areas with your babies during this time of year – shopping centres, public transport