

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) and Your Child



What is Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)?

RSV is a common respiratory virus. It affects the lungs and airways. Most children get RSV by the time they are two years old.

In some children, RSV causes a lung infection. You can learn more about the lungs and the respiratory system at [Respiratory syncytial virus \(RSV\) \(aboutkidshealth.ca\)](https://aboutkidshealth.ca).

Is RSV serious?

Most children with RSV will have cold symptoms for a couple of days. In BC, a small number (1-2%) of healthy children under one year old need hospital care for RSV.

A small number of children develop more serious infections. This is more likely if your child:

- was born premature;
- has a chronic health condition (like a chronic lung disease or congenital heart disease); or
- has an immune disorder.

How do you catch RSV?

RSV is very easy to catch. It spreads by contact, like touching, kissing or shaking hands with a person that has RSV. The RSV virus also lasts for hours on any surface, like toys, countertops and tissues.

You can get an RSV infection when you touch your mouth, nose or eyes. You can also catch it when you inhale droplets after someone with RSV sneezes or coughs. RSV is around all year but is most active during fall and winter months.

There is an increased chance of catching RSV if your child does the following:

- goes to daycare
- has a sibling who goes to daycare
- lives in a household with 5 or more people
- is exposed to second hand smoke
- is exposed to crowded environments

What are the symptoms of RSV?

Often, RSV symptoms are like cold symptoms:

- runny or stuffy nose
- cough
- fever
- eating or drinking less than normal

When should I get help?

If the virus moves down into the lungs, the lungs can get inflamed. This makes the infection worse.

Bring your child to their primary care provider if they:

- seem to be getting sicker;
- are breathing quickly;
- make a wheezy sound when they breathe;
- are lethargic (seem unusually tired);
- have a high fever; or
- have difficulty feeding.

If your child has trouble breathing, it is a medical emergency. Go to your CLOSEST EMERGENCY ROOM.

How can I help protect my child from RSV?

Clean your hands before touching your child. Ask others to do the same. Use soap and warm water or an alcohol-based hand rub. You can learn more about cleaning your hands at [Hand Hygiene \(bccdc.ca\)](https://bccdc.ca)

- Keep your child away from people who are sick. **Do not allow family or friends to visit if they are sick.**
- Keep your child away from second hand smoke, people who have recently smoked, and clothes that smell of smoke.
- Do not share personal items like cups, washcloths, and towels with people who are sick.
- Breastfeed your child. It helps protect your child from catching RSV.