

# Fact Sheet: RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus)

## What is RSV?

RSV is caused by a virus called respiratory syncytial virus. RSV most commonly occurs from late fall to early Spring. RSV also causes repeated infections throughout life, usually associated with cold-like symptoms. RSV is the most common cause of bronchiolitis and pneumonia in infants and children under one year of age. Almost all children are infected at least once by two years of age.

## What are the symptoms?

- Cough
- Runny nose
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Body aches
- Feeling tired

## How is it spread?

RSV can be spread through the air, when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or by touching a surface on which an infected person has coughed or sneezed. RSV can live on environmental surfaces for many hours and can live for 30 minutes or more on hands. An infected person may be contagious for up to 8 days after the start of the illness.

## What are the serious complications from RSV?

RSV in older children and adults is usually very mild. Some children under the age of three may develop more serious infections from RSV such as pneumonia or bronchiolitis. Premature infants and children with heart or lung disease or weak immune systems have a greater risk of developing complications.

## How is it treated?

- Rest and drink plenty of fluids.
- If needed, use a non-aspirin product (acetaminophen, ibuprofen) to reduce fever and discomfort. **Aspirin should not be used in children with viral illnesses since it has been associated with the development of Reye Syndrome.**
- Call your doctor if the symptoms appear to interfere with your child's ability to sleep or drink, or if your child is having difficult or rapid breathing.
- If the doctor prescribes medicine for your child, give all the medicine as directed.

## How is it prevented?

- Use tissues to catch coughs and sneezes and throw the tissues away in a trash can.
- Wash hands often using soap and water.
- There is currently no vaccine for RSV.

*This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information, call your health care provider or call Washtenaw County Public Health at 734-544-6700.*

