

## Fact Sheet

## RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus)

### What is RSV?

RSV is a virus that causes seasonal epidemics of respiratory illness in countries around the world. In Canada, elevated RSV activity generally takes place from late fall to early spring.

RSV is a common illness and the most common cause of lower respiratory tract illness in young children everywhere. Most children will experience RSV infections by the age of 2.

Reinfection with RSV can reoccur throughout life and repeat infections are often less severe.

Primary infection with RSV can present as upper respiratory tract illness, lower respiratory tract disease, pneumonia, bronchiolitis, or tracheobronchitis.

The risk of severe outcomes from RSV infection is higher among:

- infants and young children under the age of 2
- children with chronic lung disease, congenital heart disease, compromised immune systems or neuromuscular disorders
- adults with chronic lung or heart disease or weakened immune systems
- older adults

In severe cases, RSV requires hospitalization and may be life-threatening. In children, hospitalization rates are highest among children under 1 year old, and especially within the first 2 months of life. In adults, hospitalization is highest in older adults and those with certain chronic medical conditions.

### How is RSV spread?

Humans are the only source of infection. RSV transmission occurs from respiratory particles containing the virus and from contact with contaminated surfaces. A person is infectious for about 8 days on average, with a range of 1 to 21 days. The incubation period is sometimes longer in some infants and people with weakened immune systems.

### What are the symptoms of RSV?

The incubation period of RSV ranges from 2 to 8 days. Symptoms can include:

- rhinorrhea
- coughing
- sneezing
- headache
- fatigue
- fever
- wheezing
- pharyngitis
- bronchiolitis

In infants, the only symptoms of RSV may be decreased activity, difficulty breathing, difficulty feeding and/or irritability.

**How is RSV treated?**

Most healthy individuals will recover on their own in 1 to 2 weeks. Most treatment for RSV is to address symptoms and provide supportive care. Drinking plenty of fluids and getting adequate rest is strongly encouraged.

Over-the-counter medications, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, can be given to relieve the symptoms associated with RSV, such as fever.

People with severe RSV may need to be admitted to the hospital for oxygen and supportive care.

**How is RSV prevented?**

For older adults, there are vaccines approved to prevent RSV disease for those 60 years and older. These products cannot be used to treat individuals who already have RSV disease.

The most effective ways to prevent RSV transmission:

- stay home when ill
- wash your hands regularly
- avoid close contact with people who are sick