

FactSheet

Para Su Información

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

What is respiratory syncytial virus?

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a viral disease of the respiratory tract which is seasonally predictable, with peaks during the winter and early spring.

Who gets RSV?

RSV is very common: almost everyone has an infection with this virus in their first few years of life. RSV is a cause of the common cold in people of most ages. However, in infants and young children, it is the most important cause of inflammation of the bronchial tubes of the lungs, and of pneumonia. For children under six months of age, it can be a severe disease, especially if they have a condition such as prematurity, heart disease at birth, respiratory disease, or a disease or treatment affecting the immune system.

How is the virus spread?

Humans are the only source of infection. RSV may be spread by direct or close contact, which may involve droplets from the nose or mouth of an infected person. RSV may also be spread indirectly by hands, handkerchiefs, tissues, eating utensils or other items contaminated with the virus.

What are the symptoms of RSV?

Symptoms of RSV include fever, chills, headache, general aching, tiredness, and a loss of appetite. Other signs include inflammation of the lining of the nose, throat, tonsils, upper breathing tubes, or bronchial tubes of the lungs. In premature infants the signs may be minimal and often include lethargy, irritability, poor feeding, and apnea (temporary cessation of breathing).

How soon do symptoms appear?

The first symptoms usually appear within one to ten days after being exposed, but the average time is five days after exposure.

How long can an infected person spread the virus?

People are infectious just before the onset of the disease and for as long as they are ill. Viral shedding usually lasts two to eight days, but may be longer in young infants who may gradually shed the virus for three to four weeks.

Can a person get RSV again?

Reinfection throughout life is common because we do not develop immunity. Infection in older children and adults usually causes cold symptoms and sometimes inflammation of the bronchial tubes.

What is the treatment for RSV?

Most healthy infants improve with only supportive care within two to five days. However, children with more severe RSV often require hospitalization and aerosol treatment. The use of respiratory syncytial virus immune globulin has been shown to improve the outcomes of high-risk infants when used in combination with drug treatment.

How can the spread of RSV be stopped?

Breastfeeding offers some protection against respiratory infections for infants. Prevention of the infection at home is probably impossible. Nevertheless, in childcare facilities and hospitals, frequent handwashing by employees in contact with infants is important. Hospital and childcare employees with upper respiratory infections during

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the RSV season should not care for infants at risk for severe RSV. A vaccine to prevent RSV is not yet available.

Where can I get more information?

Contact your doctor or the Southern Nevada Health District, Office of Epidemiology at (702) 759-1300.



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