

# Information for parents about RSV **Respiratory Syncytial Virus**

#### What is RSV?

Respiratory Syncytial Virus or RSV is a common virus found in saliva. It can spread easily from person to person by kissing, touching, coughing or sneezing. People can have the virus and pass it on, even when they do not feel sick. RSV can also live on objects, such as toys and cribs, for up to 6 hours.

By the age of 2, almost all children have had RSV. In most children and adults, RSV causes a mild illness like a cold. However, some babies and young children with health problems can get very sick from RSV.

RSV illness usually occurs during the months from fall to spring.

## How can I prevent my child from getting RSV?

The best way to prevent the spread of RSV is careful hand washing. Parents, family members and visitors need to wash their hands often:

- before touching or caring for your child
- after coughing or sneezing
- after touching your mouth or nose
- after returning home from work, school or other activities

Try to keep your child away from crowds and people with colds. Family members or visitors with a cold or fever should not be around your child. If you have a cold, you may be asked to wear a mask.

### What are the symptoms of RSV?

RSV begins like a cold, with mild symptoms such as a runny or stuffy nose, sneezing or fever. In some children, the symptoms can quickly get worse.

#### How is RSV treated?

Most children get better with rest, drinking lots of liquids and taking medication for fever. Antibiotics cannot help, because they do not work against viruses. Call your doctor's office if you would like advice about caring for your child or you become concerned about your child.

Some children need to be cared for in the hospital. If your child needs to stay in the hospital, he or she will have tests to help the doctor decide how to best treat your child. One test takes a sample of the fluid at the back of your child's throat. This test may need to be repeated before going home. Your child may need medication to control fever and oxygen to help him or her breathe easier.

In the hospital, your child will be cared for in isolation. This means that your child must stay in his or her hospital room. This protects your child and others from infection. Each time you enter or leave the room you must wash your hands to help prevent passing on the virus.

It is also important to wash your hands before you touch anything in common areas such as the kitchen, which is used by many other people. While your child is in isolation, we suggest that you limit visitors, including your other children.

## Can my child get RSV again?

Your child can get RSV again. Usually, the symptoms are milder than the first time.

If your child has been in the hospital with RSV, you will need to:

- wash the personal items you and your child have used at the hospital
- wash your child's personal items at home such as bedding and toys

#### When should I call the doctor?

Call your family doctor or pediatrician if you are concerned or notice that your child:

- feeds or eats poorly
- has fewer wet diapers in a day
- has flushed skin or feels hot
- difficulty breathing or wheezing
- is breathing very quickly
- has trouble breathing or is wheezing
- has a blue colour of the lips or around the mouth
- is pale or looks unwell
- coughing so much that he or she starts to gag or vomit
- is less active than usual

If you have any questions about RSV, please talk with your family doctor or pediatrician.