Fact Sheet

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

What is respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)?

RSV is a major cause of respiratory illness in people. It is the most common cause of bronchiolitis, croup, ear infections and pneumonia in infants and young children.

What are the symptoms of RSV?

- Begins with fever, runny nose, cough and sometimes wheezing
- Lethargy, irritability and poor feeding
- Chronic lung conditions and asthma may be aggravated by RSV
- Infants and children with heart or respiratory problems are at increased risk of pneumonia and other complications from RSV

If your baby is having difficulty breathing or feeding, seek medical attention at the local health centre

What is the treatment for RSV?

There is no specific treatment for RSV. Health care providers may prescribe preventive medications (Synagis®) to infants who are at high risk of becoming very ill from RSV including premature babies.

How is RSV spread?

- Contact with the discharge from the nose or mouth of an infected person
- RSV can survive on environmental surfaces (e.g. kitchen counters, telephones, or toys) for many hours.
- The virus can be spread on a person's hands after he or she touches things

For how long is an infected person able to spread RSV?

Infected individuals spread RSV for as long as they are ill (usually 3-8 days).

How can RSV be prevented?

- Frequent hand washing with soap and warm water.
- Clean surfaces with hot water and soap and disinfect with a simple bleach and water solution (1/4 teaspoon chlorine beach in 2 cups of water).
- Avoid taking infants and children to public gatherings when there is a lot of respiratory illness in your community.
- RSV prophylaxis (Synagis®) is recommended for prevention of RSV infection in some children. Contact your community health centre to find out if your child is eligible.
- Avoid exposing your baby to tobacco smoke and breastfeed as long as you can

For More Information

Contact your local Community Health Center / Public Health.