Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a virus that infects the respiratory tract. RSV is the most common cause of bronchiolitis and pneumonia in children under 1 year of age. Most children will have been infected with the virus by their second birthday. Humans are the only known source of RSV.

RSV is spread by contaminated secretions and surfaces. You can get RSV by touching a contaminated surface and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth. RSV can live on contaminated hands for up to 30 minutes but can survive for several hours on solid surfaces such as doorknobs and telephone handsets.

- Droplet spread occurs by contact with large-particle droplets, usually 6 feet or less from patients.
- Contact spread occurs when infected people cough or sneeze onto surfaces, or touch surfaces with unwashed hands.

What are the symptoms for RSV?

Symptoms may include coughing, wheezing, sneezing, runny nose, fever, and a decrease in appetite. Young infants may also experience irritability, decreased activity, and breathing difficulties. Some adults may have more severe symptoms consistent with a lower respiratory tract infection, such as pneumonia.

- The incubation period ranges from 2–8 days, however 4–6 days is most common.
- Once infected, viral shedding occurs for 3–8 days. In infants or immunosuppressed patients, viral shedding may continue for 3–4 weeks.
Anyone can become infected with RSV. Those at high risk for severe illness from RSV include:

- infants and young children
- older adults, especially those 65 years and older
- adults with chronic lung or heart disease
- adults with weakened immune systems

What is treatment for RSV?
There is no treatment for RSV other than over-the-counter medication to manage symptoms. It is important for people with RSV infection to drink enough fluids to prevent dehydration.

How can you prevent RSV?
Researchers are working to develop RSV vaccines, but none are available yet. A drug called palivizumab (pah-lih-VIH-zu-mahb) is available to prevent severe RSV illness in certain infants and children who are at high risk for severe disease. The drug can help prevent serious RSV disease, but it cannot help cure or treat children already suffering from serious RSV disease, and it cannot prevent infection with RSV.

- washing your hands well and often with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.
- avoiding contact between your face and unwashed hands.
- avoiding close contact with sick people, such as kissing, shaking hands, sharing cups or eating utensils.
- coughing and/or sneezing into a tissue or your sleeve, then wash your hands after.
- cleaning and disinfecting all surfaces on a regular basis.

Wear a mask when coming into contact with people with RSV who are coughing and/or sneezing. If you need to stay in the hospital, ask for a private room. If a private room is not available, you may be paired with another patient who has RSV.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**


*Red Book. 31st Edition—Respiratory Syncytial Virus pp. 682-692*