

# Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

## What is it?

Respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, is a common lung virus. It usually causes mild to severe cold-like symptoms. Most people recover in a week or two. But, RSV can be serious, especially for infants, adults with long-term conditions, and older adults. RSV is the most common cause of bronchiolitis (inflammation of the small airways in the lung) and pneumonia (infection of the lungs). RSV is also a common reason why children younger than one are hospitalized in the United States.

## How does RSV spread?

- An infected person coughs or sneezes
- Virus droplets from a cough or sneeze in your eyes, nose, or mouth
- Physical contact with the virus, like kissing the face of a child with RSV
- Touching a surface that has the virus on it, then touching your face before washing your hands

People with RSV are usually contagious for three to eight days. They may be contagious before they start showing signs of being sick. However, some infants, and people with weakened immune systems, can continue to spread the virus for weeks after they feel better.

**For more information, visit:**  
[cdc.gov/rsv](https://www.cdc.gov/rsv)

## What are the signs and symptoms of RSV and vaccine recommendations to protect against RSV?



### INFANTS

- Fussiness
- Poor feeding
- Sleepiness
- Apnea  
*(pauses in breathing)*
- Fever  
*(not always present)*

RSV shot recommended for:

- **Infants younger than 8 months** born during or entering their first RSV season.



### CHILDREN

- Runny nose
- Decreased appetite
- Cough
- Sneezing
- Fever
- Trouble swallowing
- Breathing changes

RSV shot recommended for:

- **Children between the ages of 8 and 19 months** who remain vulnerable to severe RS disease through their second RSV season.



### ADULTS

- Runny nose
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Congestion
- Fever

RSV shot recommended for:

- **Women who are 32-36 weeks pregnant** during RSV season.
- **Adults 60 and older.**

- RSV season in the United States typically runs from late fall to early spring.
- Please talk to your doctor or your child's doctor regarding an RSV vaccine for your specific situation.

## Go to the nearest Emergency Department or call 911 if you or your child has:

- Noisy breathing
- Spreading out nostrils with every breath
- Blue or gray color to lips, mouth, and fingernails
- Belly breathing or "caving in" of the chest in the form of an upside-down "V" starting under the neck
- Short, shallow, slow or rapid breathing
- Pauses while breathing



## How is RSV diagnosed?

A doctor will ask you about your symptoms, listen to your lungs. Your oxygen level may be checked, too.

You may get a swab test or blood sample to detect the virus or infection. You may need more tests for severe illness.

## What do I do if I think I have RSV?

**Most RSV infections go away on their own in a week or two. To relieve symptoms:**

- Manage fever and pain. Use over-the-counter medications like acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Never give aspirin to children.
- Drink enough fluids. Drinking enough fluids prevents dehydration (loss of body fluids).
- Talk to your doctor before giving your child nonprescription cold medicines. Some medicines have ingredients that are not good for children.
- Use a cool mist vaporizer to soothe your nostrils and throat. Talk to your doctor first.
- Use saline nasal drops to loosen mucus in your nose.
- Blow your nose to keep your airways open. You can gently suck mucus out of your infant's nose.
- If you do not have a doctor, call **1-877-THR-WELL (1-877-847-9355)**.

## How do I protect myself and others?

GET VACCINATED



WASH YOUR HANDS OFTEN

KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF YOUR FACE

AVOID CLOSE CONTACT WITH SICK PEOPLE

COVER YOUR COUGHS AND SNEEZES



CLEAN AND DISINFECT SURFACES

STAY HOME WHEN YOU ARE SICK

SYMPTOMS	COLD	FLU	CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)	RSV
HOW IT STARTS	Starts a little at a time	Starts quickly all at once	May appear 2-14 days after exposure	3-8 days after exposure
HEADACHE	Rare	Common	Sometimes	Common in adults
FEVER	Rare	Common, lasts 3-4 days	Common	Common
BODY ACHES & PAINS	Sometimes	Common, often severe	Common	Rare
CHILLS	Rare	Common	Common	Common
TIREDNESS/WEAKNESS	Sometimes	Common, can last 2-3 weeks	Common	Common
RUNNY/STUFFY NOSE	Common	Sometimes	Sometimes	Common
SNEEZING	Common	Sometimes	Rare	Common
SORE THROAT	Common	Sometimes	Common	Common
CHEST DISCOMFORT/ COUGH	Common - mild to moderate, hacking cough	Common, can be severe	Common, can be severe	Common
SHORTNESS OF BREATH/ PROBLEMS BREATHING	Sometimes	Sometimes	Common	Common
NEW LOSS OF TASTE/SMELL	Rare	Rare	Common	Rare
DIARRHEA/VOMITING	Rare	Sometimes (more common in children than adults)	Sometimes	Rare
COMPLICATIONS	Sinus congestion, ear ache	Bronchitis, pneumonia, can be life-threatening	Pneumonia, stroke, heart attack, organ failure, can be life threatening	Common for infants and older adults
INFECTION WITH NO SYMPTOMS	Rare	Rare	Sometimes	Rare
VACCINE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

SOURCES  
<https://www.cdc.gov/rsv/>; <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/symptoms.htm>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/flu-vs-covid19.htm>  
<https://www.healthline.com/health-news/flu-allergies-coronavirus-different-symptoms#Despite-symptoms,-its-not-the-flu>