

Have you heard of RSV?

RSV, or 'respiratory syncytial virus', can cause illnesses that affect breathing.¹

Here you can find out more about RSV, spot the signs of illness in your baby and how to help protect them.

RSV is a common contagious virus which can make babies ill. Nearly all will have been infected with RSV by 3 years of age.²

While most RSV cases are mild, all infants are potentially at risk of developing bronchiolitis or pneumonia from RSV – and we can't predict which infants could get seriously ill and end up in hospital.³⁻⁵ Bronchiolitis and pneumonia are respiratory conditions which can cause difficulty in breathing and may require care in hospital.^{3,6}

Read on to find out more about RSV and how to help protect your baby...



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Spot the signs of illness in your baby

RSV can look like many other illnesses. Some of the symptoms of illness could be:^{1,7}



Cold-like symptoms such as a blocked nose, a cough, or a fever



Loss of appetite in older children, or decreased feeding in babies



Wheezing



Decreased activity

If you have any concerns about the health of your infant, talk to your healthcare provider for more information

Although not common, sometimes symptoms can become severe quickly and more urgent help is required. The Sydney Children's Hospitals Network and the Royal Children's Hospital recommend that you call 000 if you notice that your child:^{1,7}



Is having severe difficulty breathing or is breathing very quickly



Is having trouble tolerating fluids, or has stopped passing urine



Is making a 'grunting' noise, or has blue-coloured lips or skin



Appears very unwell and lethargic



Help protect your baby

Severe RSV-related illness can affect family life and may leave parents feeling worried, overwhelmed and stressed.⁸ But there are steps you can take to help protect your baby and family.

Be aware that:



RSV occurs seasonally in most places (often from the winter months through to spring) and is easily spread⁹



RSV can survive on hard surfaces and toys for many hours. The virus can spread if an infant touches these surfaces and then touches their face¹⁰



RSV is easily spread through coughs, sneezes and close physical contact, like cuddles and kisses¹⁰



Research has shown that RSV is mostly spread to infants by older siblings or other children^{11,12}

Help prevent the spread of RSV by:



Frequently washing your hands for at least 20 seconds²



Coughing and sneezing into a tissue or your elbow²



Disinfecting things like hard surfaces, toys and utensils²



Keeping your baby away from people who are sick²

For more information about RSV and preventions speak to your healthcare professional.

1. Sydney Children's Hospitals Network. Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). 2025. Available from: <https://www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv-factsheet>. Accessed August 2025. 2. NSW Government. NSW Health. Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Available at: <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/infectious/factsheets/Pages/respiratory-syncytial-virus.aspx>. Accessed August 2025. 3. Karron RA. Plotkin's Vaccines. Seventh edition. Chapter 51, Respiratory Syncytial Virus Vaccines. Elsevier Inc. 2018. 4. Hall CB et al. Pediatrics 2013; 132(2): e341-348. 5. Bianchini S et al. Microorganisms 2020; 8(12): 2048. 6. Meissner HC. N Engl J Med 2016; 374(1): 62-72. 7. The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne. Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). 2025. Available at: https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Respiratory_syncytial_virus_RSV. Accessed August 2025. 8. Young M & Smitherman L. Infect Dis Ther 2021; 10: 35-45. 9. Li Y et al. Lancet Glob Health 2019; 7: e1031-e10. 10. Piedmont G & Perez MK. Pediatr Rev 2014; 35(12): 519-530. 11. Jacoby P et al. Epidemiol Infect 2017; 145(2): 266-271. 12. Yamin D et al. Proc Natl Acad Sci USA 2016; 113(46): 13239-13244.

Preventative options to help protect your baby against RSV

With your baby on the way, it's an important time to find out about ways to help protect your baby against respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

Available preventative options against RSV include:¹

- Vaccination in pregnancy

OR

- Preventative antibodies given from birth to offer direct protection to infants

Discuss with your healthcare professional to find out what option(s) is/are available.



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Vaccination in pregnancy (ViP)

ViP is when a vaccine is given to a pregnant individual, whose body responds by making antibodies that target a particular germ.²

These antibodies are then passed to the infant through the placenta to help protect them against illness.²



Preventative antibodies

Babies' immune systems are still developing so they may not be able to quickly fight off an infection on their own.^{2,3}

Preventative antibodies can be provided directly to the baby to help prevent illness due to a specific germ.⁴

More Information

To find out more about RSV and immunisation, go to:

- the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing at health.gov.au/immunisation
- your state or territory health department website or trusted health professional
- Sharing Knowledge About Immunisation at skai.org.au.

For more information about RSV and preventions speak to your healthcare professional.

Abbreviations: **RSV**, respiratory syncytial virus; **ViP**, vaccination in pregnancy

1. Australian Immunisation Handbook. Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Available at: <https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/contents/vaccine-preventable-diseases/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv>. Accessed: August 2025. **2.** Faucette A et al. Hum Vacc Immunother 2015; 11(11): 2549-2555. **3.** Simon AK et al. Proc Biol Sci 2015; 282(1821):20143085. **4.** Verwey C and Madhi SA. BioDrugs 2023; 37: 295-309.