

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) infections occur in autumn and winter, and in some seasons even in the spring months. RSV is the most common cause of acute bronchiolitis in young children, but causes milder colds in older children and adults. The start of RSV circulation can only be detected if respiratory infections are tested for RSV, as the clinical picture of RSV infection does not follow a typical course.

1. How can we reduce the risk of RSV infection?

This virus is highly contagious. Babies can become infected with RSV if they come into contact with a child or adult who is infected with the virus. RSV can be spread by coughing and sneezing or by direct contact. As parents, you can help reduce your risk of RSV infection by taking a few steps, both at home and outside the home.

- Wash your hands with warm water and soap before holding your baby.
- If you have a cold or fever, you should know that kissing your baby can give him/her RSV; so just give your baby a gentle hug or a pat on the head.
- If siblings have a cold or fever, make sure they do not get too close to the baby.
- Make sure that people with signs of a cold or fever do not approach your child.
- Don't take your child to places where a lot of people gather (kindergartens, shopping centres, large family gatherings, etc.).
- If you have a new-born at home, it is advisable to keep the older sibling out of kindergarten, as they can bring RSV home.
- We advise against visits until the child is 2 months old.
- Do not smoke around your child. Do not allow smoking in the house.

2. What is RSV?

RSV stands for RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS. It is a very common cause of respiratory infections in infants and children in early childhood. About two-thirds of babies become infected with RSV in the first year of life, and by the end of the second year, almost every child is infected with RSV. The risk of developing a more severe form of RSV infection is particularly high in children born prematurely, children with chronic lung disease and children with severe congenital heart disease.

RSV infections occur most frequently from autumn to spring in countries with temperate climates.

3. Is RSV easily transmitted?

Yes, RSV is easily transmitted. This very common virus is spread by physical contact (touching, kissing, handling) with an infected person. Germs are also spread through the air when you cough or sneeze. In addition, RSV can survive for hours - on a shop counter or on a used tissue.

RSV infection is very common where there are many people, for example in kindergartens, shopping centres. A person can be exposed to the virus and unknowingly pass it on to others. It is therefore very important to take appropriate measures to prevent a baby from being infected with RSV.

4. Which children are at higher risk of a more severe course of RSV infection?

RSV causes a mild cold in most babies. But in particular cases - including premature babies, children with chronic lung disease and children with severe congenital heart disease - RSV can cause lung infections. Such babies can become seriously ill.

CHILDREN BORN PREMATURELY

Children born prematurely are at higher risk of more severe RSV infection because their respiratory and immune systems are not mature at birth.

BRONCHOPULMONARY DYSPLASIA

Bronchopulmonary dysplasia (BPD) is most common in premature babies who were born very prematurely and require artificial ventilation and/or high oxygen levels for a long period of time.

Signs of bronchopulmonary dysplasia include:

- The need for supplementary oxygen;
- Difficult, faster breathing;
- Characteristic changes on lung X-ray.

CONGENITAL HEART DISEASE

There are several different types of congenital heart defects. Some forms greatly increase the risk of developing severe disease when infected with RSV. If your child has a congenital heart defect, ask your doctor for more detailed information.

5. What are the signs of RSV infection?

Signs of RSV infection may initially appear as a cold and may include:

- fever,
- watery runny nose,
- other signs of a cold.

Symptoms can worsen as the virus spreads to the lungs, manifesting as:

- a dry, irritating cough,
- shortness of breath,
- gasping or wheezing,
- rapid breathing,
- turning blue,
- longer breathing pauses.