

Respiratory Syncytial Virus

25 August 2021

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a common respiratory virus that causes lung and respiratory tract infections. It is highly contagious. A person infected with RSV spreads the virus in droplets when they cough, sneeze, or talk.

General information on RSV

Colds, flu, and other respiratory viruses including respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) are more common at this time of year and can be easily spread in schools and early childhood centres (and crowded households).

RSV is a common respiratory virus that causes respiratory tract infections, including the common cold.

RSV spreads very easily between people; from person to person through infected respiratory droplets (like COVID-19). RSV can spread through droplets from a sneeze or cough. People can be infected by touching their nose or eyes after touching a person with RSV or contaminated items.

A person is usually infectious for up to 10 days after symptoms begin and most people take about 10 days to recover and will get better on their own.

In some vulnerable people such as the very young this viral infection can spread down into the lungs causing severe illness. About two in every 100 children under the age of two will require hospitalisation to support their feeding and oxygen levels until the illness resolves.

To stop the spread of RSV and other viruses, everyone should maintain good hand hygiene and stay home if they have any cold or flu symptoms.

If you or your child has RSV, the most common symptoms are:

- A runny nose
- Sore throat
- Coughing or sneezing
- Fever
- Wheezing and difficulty breathing (not at first, but indicates risk)
- Loss of appetite or difficulty feeding due to breathlessness (another late symptom)

Shortness of breath or abnormally rapid breathing always requires immediate medical attention.

In very young infants, the symptoms may be subtle: irritability or decreased activity may be the only signs your child is unwell.

Breathing difficulties indicate there is inflammation in the airways caused by the viral infection.

RSV infections may progress to cause pneumonia and bronchiolitis, especially in infants.

If you are concerned about your health or your child's health, **call 0800 1801 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and ask for Healthline.**

What can schools and early childcare centres do to prevent the spread of illnesses, like RSV?

Colds, flu, and other respiratory viruses like RSV are more common at this time of year and can be easily spread in schools and early childhood centres (and crowded households).

The following measures will help reduce the spread of winter illnesses:

- Staff, children, toddlers, and babies should stay home if they are sick. They should not attend early childhood education (ECE), childcare, or school until their symptoms have fully resolved, which can be a week
 - if a child has fully recovered, **they do not** need to produce a medical certificate from before returning to the centre or school
 - parents and caregivers should be aware of your ECE or schools illness policy.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbows and carefully discard dirty tissues
- Regularly wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and dry them thoroughly
 - display handwashing posters near sinks to ensure good hand washing and drying procedures are being followed.
 - If hand washing facilities are not available an alcohol-based sanitizer can be used.
- Clean surfaces regularly
 - particularly frequently touched surfaces that are at child height
 - toys which are shared among children should be washed in warm water and detergent at the end of the day, or session, or more often if they are sneezed on or mouthed
 - discourage the sharing of eating and drinking utensils.

Additional information for parents and caregivers

Anyone who is unwell should stay at home until they are symptom free and feeling well. Your child should not return to childcare, school, or work until 24 hours after their symptoms have resolved.

Prevention

To help prevent the spread of RSV, follow these tips if you have cold-like symptoms:

- Cover your nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for 15-20 seconds
- Avoid sharing cups and eating utensils with others
- Refrain from kissing others

When to seek medical help/care

If you think your child or someone in your home might have an RSV infection that requires medical care contact **Te Mārae Ora on 0800 1801 and ask to speak to the doctor.**

For more information, please visit www.health.gov.ck