



Children's Hospital

HEALTHY

Kidz

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Watch for signs of RSV in young children

Colds, flu and chicken pox are prevalent health problems in children and infants, but there is one respiratory virus that can be particularly serious for very young children: Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV). Lori Patterson, M.D., pediatric infectious disease specialist at Children's Hospital, offers the following information for prevention, detection and treatment of RSV.

Q. What is Respiratory Syncytial Virus or RSV?

A. RSV is a virus that causes an infection of the lungs and breathing passages. It is very common in children beginning in the late fall and continuing through the spring and is potentially serious for young children and infants. It can infect the same person several times during a lifetime, causing more severe illnesses (like bronchiolitis or pneumonia) in infancy, but only a common cold in adults and older children.

The highest rates of severe RSV illness occur in infants 2-6 months old, with a peak at age 2-3 months. RSV infection is often carried home by a school-aged child and passed on to a younger sibling.

Q. My children experience cold and flu-like symptoms each year through time spent with other children at day care and in elementary school. What are the specific signs and symptoms of RSV?

A. RSV infection produces a variety of signs and symptoms involving different areas of the respiratory tract from the nose to the lungs. It usually causes a simple upper respiratory tract illness (common cold). Symptoms include a stuffy or runny nose, mild cough, and a general feeling of being ill. In children younger than 3 years, RSV can cause a lower respiratory tract illness like bronchiolitis or pneumonia, and in the most severe cases can lead to respiratory failure. Symptoms may include cough, wheezing, abnormally rapid breathing, poor feeding, and fussiness. In the most severely affected infants, we may see periods of stopped breathing (apnea) or a bluish color of the lips or fingernails caused by lowered levels of oxygen in the blood.

Q. My family has children of different ages, and they attend different schools and day care programs. How can I prevent my children from passing RSV back and forth between them?

A. Because RSV spreads in fluids from the nose and throat of an infected person, it is best to wash your hands after coming in contact with anyone who has a cold or a known RSV infection. This is especially important

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Safety comes first when choosing items for baby

Even though babies are small, compact bundles, there is nothing small or simple about their accessories. And choosing products for babies can be confusing with all the gadgets and features available, especially if you are choosing a holiday gift for a special baby in your life. There is one overriding consideration that must never be compromised when picking out baby products, whether buying, borrowing, or accepting a hand-me-down, and that is *safety*.

East Tennessee Children's Hospital offers the following suggestions for specific product safety and a few safety notes for parents:

Cribs:

- The distance between slats must be no more than 2 3/8 inches in order to protect infants from falling out and toddlers from trapping their heads between the slats.
- The side rails that lower should have at least two locking devices to prevent older babies from releasing them.
- If the crib has corner posts, they must be either flush with the top of the headboard and footboard or very tall - over 16 inches. Anything in between is a potential strangulation hazard.
- Get the firmest mattress you can find. This is extremely important, because a soft mattress may play a role in sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- Evaluate a used crib with extra care. Too much space between slats or elaborate cut-outs in the headboard and footboard can trap a baby's head. A crib made before 1978 may have a finish that contains lead, so a crib that has been in the family for generations

may not be the best one to use.

Gates:

- Look for a hardware-mounted gate that attaches to the door frame without any openings to trap fingers.
- Pressure mounted gates should not be used between rooms of different levels or at the top of stairs; children can dislodge them and take a tumble. Remember to place the pressure bar away from the child.
- Gates that swing out should never be used at the top of stairways.
- Nonflexible vertical slats or rods should be no more than 2 3/8 inches apart.
- Avoid gates with structures that could give a child a foothold for climbing.
- Discontinue using the gate when the child is about 2 years old (the gate should be no less than 3/4 of the child's height).

Strollers:

- Examine the stroller for reliable restraining belts. The safest design is the "T" buckle: a crotch strap and waist belts that connect together.
- The best brakes lock the back wheels by engaging mechanisms in the wheels themselves, rather than relying on pressure on the tires.
- The stroller should be free from parts that can pinch a child's fingers or pose a choking hazard.
- The leg openings should be small enough to prevent an infant from slipping through.
- Never hang purses or diaper bags on the handles of a stroller. A baby could get tangled in the straps and be strangled.

RSV, from page 1

after wiping a runny nose; tissues should be discarded promptly. Also, it is wise not to touch your nose or eyes after contact with someone with RSV as the virus could enter your body through either of these two areas. And whenever your school-age child comes down with a cold, keep him or her away from an infant sibling until the symptoms pass.

There are treatments that can be given to protect infants who are at highest risk for severe RSV illness, such as premature babies and those with chronic heart and lung disease. These treatments provide temporary immune protection against RSV.

Q. Is there anything parents can do at home to help treat RSV?

A. In treating RSV infection, the goal is to make children more comfortable while their bodies fight the virus. Give your child plenty of fluids such as water and fruit juice - these help keep nasal secretions watery and easy to clear. Using a cool-mist vaporizer to humidify the air may help soothe irritated breathing passages and relieve coughing. Parents may treat fever with a non-aspirin fever medication like acetaminophen. Aspirin should NOT be used in children with viral illnesses since the use of aspirin in such cases has been associated with the development of Reye syndrome, a serious encephalitis-like illness. I generally do not recommend the use of cough medicines, especially in young babies, unless the cough is preventing the child from sleeping.

Q. What are the ways a doctor will treat my child with RSV?

A. RSV is not treated with antibiotics, because those drugs do not work against viruses. Younger children who have severe RSV pneumonia or bronchiolitis may need to be treated in a hospital. There they can receive specialized respiratory therapy, including humidified oxygen and medicines to open up their breathing passages. The family pediatrician or hospital physician may prescribe medications to help with breathing and cold-like symptoms. A nebulizer, which is a breathing treatment machine, may also be needed to aid the child.

Q. At what point should I take my child to the physician?

A. Call your child's physician if your child has any of the following symptoms: fever above 101 degrees Fahrenheit; cough that lasts more than a few days; chest pain; difficulty breathing; very rapid breathing; bluish or gray color of the lips, skin or fingernails; a decrease in the frequency of wet diapers; or lethargy. And of course, call your doctor if you have any questions or concerns.

In addition to symptoms already mentioned, call your child's physician if your infant is unusually irritable or inactive, or if he or she refuses to breast-feed or bottle-feed.

Frequent hand washing after coughing or sneezing can help reduce the spread of the virus, as can avoiding crowds during the winter months. Parents and childcare workers should watch for persistent cough, fever or breathing problems (especially in very young infants) and consult a pediatrician if these symptoms appear. Early detection can help prevent the spreading of the virus to other children.

Chick-fil-A 10-Second Tip

Sing one verse of "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" with your children while they wash their hands to make sure they scrub long enough. A minimum of 10-15 seconds is recommended.

Handwashing, from page 4

person contact; hepatitis A, meningitis and infectious diarrhea can all be transmitted through unwashed hands. Countertops, doorknobs, money and telephones are often culprits that harbor germs. Insisting on proper hygiene can help keep your family healthy. By frequently washing your hands, you kill germs that have been picked up from contaminated surfaces, animals and other people. Hand washing is generally considered to be the most important way to stop the spread of infection.

Lather up to prevent illness

Colds, the flu and other illnesses spread quickly from person to person through the air and from direct contact. Unwashed hands provide a breeding ground for germs of all kinds and can quickly lead to rapid infection. One of the most common ways that people contract colds is by rubbing their eyes or nose after contacting a cold virus. The average baby or toddler catches up to ten colds per year and school-age children usually catch three to six colds per year. However, simply washing your hands, and making sure that your children do the same, is a simple and effective way to prevent the spread of disease.

Just remember to always wash your hands:

- before eating or touching food in any way
- after using the bathroom
- after coughing or blowing your nose
- after touching any pets or animals
- after playing outside
- when someone in your home is ill, wash your hands frequently

It is also important to wash your hands the right way. Always use warm water and soap. Work up a lather on both sides of your hands, your wrists, between your fingers and around your nails for 10-15 seconds. Then rinse and dry your hands with a clean towel.

Colds aren't the only illness easily transmitted through person to

See Handwashing, page 3

Healthy Kids wants to know what you think

In addition to the *Healthy Kids* newsletters, the Healthy Kids program also offers parenting education classes on a variety of topics from Infant/Child CPR to nutrition topics. We want to know what topics interest you as parents, teachers and care givers.

Please call the Children's Hospital Community Relations Department at (865) 541-8166 with suggestions for classes. You may also e-mail us at care@etch.com or write to Healthy Kids, P.O. Box 15010, Knoxville, TN 37901.



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This newsletter is a part of Children's Hospital's Healthy Kids Community Education Campaign, which serves as a resource for parents, offering classes, literature and other opportunities for learning how to improve children's health. For more information about Children's Hospital's Healthy Kids Campaign, please call the community education line at (865) 541-8262.

Correspondence regarding the newsletter or Children's Hospital's Healthy Kids Campaign may be addressed to:

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