

# IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

## RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS (RSV)

RSV is the most common cause of bronchiolitis (inflammation of the small airways in the lung) and pneumonia in children under 1 year of age in the United States. Each year, 75,000 to 125,000 children in this age group are hospitalized due to RSV infection. Almost all children are infected with the virus by their second birthday, but only a small percentage will develop severe disease.

### Symptoms

Illness usually begins 4 to 6 days after exposure (range: 2 to 8 days) with:

- Runny nose and decrease in appetite.
- Coughing, sneezing, and fever typically develop 1 to 3 days later. Wheezing may also occur.
- Young infants may have irritability, decreased activity, and breathing difficulties
- Premature infants, small children with chronic health problems or weakened immune systems due to a medical condition or medical treatment are at highest risk for severe disease. For healthy children, the illness is like a cold and lasts a few days.

### Transmission

- RSV can be spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes into the air. Coughing and sneezing send virus-containing droplets into the air, where they can infect a person if they inhale these droplets or these droplets come in contact with their mouth, nose, or eye.
- Infection can also result from contact with fluids from the nose and throat from infected persons. This may occur by kissing or touching someone with RSV, or by touching a contaminated surface or object and then rubbing their eyes or nose. RSV survives on hard surfaces such as tables and crib rails for hours and soft surfaces like tissues for shorter periods.
- RSV infections generally occur in the United States from November to April.
- People infected with RSV are usually contagious for 3 to 8 days. However, some infants and people with weakened immune systems can be contagious for as long as 4 weeks.

### Treatment

- There is no specific treatment for most cases of RSV infection.
- In severe cases of disease, infants may require oxygen therapy, suctioning of mucus from the airways, or to be on a breathing machine.

### Prevention

- Frequent handwashing, covering coughs and sneezes, and wiping down surfaces with soap and water or disinfectant may help stop spread of RSV. Avoid sharing cups and eating utensils.
- Researchers are working to develop RSV vaccines, but none is available yet. A drug called palivizumab is available to prevent severe RSV illness in infants and children who are at high risk.
- Ideally, persons with cold-like symptoms should not interact with high-risk children.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



c/o Franklin County Public Health, 280 East Broad Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215-4562

Call: (614) 525-8888 • After Hours: (614) 525-3965 • Fax: (614) 525-8890

Email: [idrs@franklincountyohio.gov](mailto:idrs@franklincountyohio.gov) • Web: [www.idrsinfo.org](http://www.idrsinfo.org)



COLUMBUS  
PUBLIC HEALTH