

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) in Children: Care Instructions

Overview

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a viral illness that causes symptoms like those of a bad cold. It is most common in babies. RSV spreads easily. It goes away on its own and usually does not cause major health problems. However, it can lead to other problems, such as bronchiolitis.

Children with this illness may wheeze and make a lot of mucus. Lots of rest and plenty of fluids can help your child get well. Most children feel better in one to two weeks.

Follow-up care is a key part of your child's treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if your child is having problems. It's also a good idea to know your child's test results and keep a list of the medicines your child takes.

How can you care for your child at home?

- Be safe with medicines. Have your child take medicine exactly as prescribed. Do not stop or change a medicine without talking to your child's doctor first.
- Give your child lots of fluids. Offer your baby breastfeeding or bottle-feeding more often. Do not give your baby sports drinks, soft drinks, or undiluted fruit juice, as these may have too much sugar, too few calories, or not enough minerals.
- Give your child sips of water or drinks such as Pedialyte or Infalyte. These drinks contain the right mix of salt, sugar, and minerals. You can buy them at drugstores or grocery stores. Do not use them as the only source of liquids or food for more than 12 to 24 hours.
- If your child has problems breathing because of a stuffy nose, squirt a few saline (saltwater) nasal drops in one nostril. For older children, have them blow their nose. Repeat for the other nostril. You can also place extra pillows under the upper half of an older child's body. For babies, put a drop or two in one nostril. Using a soft rubber suction bulb, squeeze air out of the bulb, and gently place the tip of the bulb inside the baby's nose. Relax your hand to suck the mucus from the nose. Repeat in the other nostril.
- Give acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) for fever if your child's doctor says it is okay. Read and follow all instructions on the label. Do not give aspirin to anyone younger than 20. It has been linked to Reye syndrome, a serious illness.
- Be careful with cough and cold medicines. Don't give them to children younger than 6, because they don't work for children that age and can even be harmful. For children 6 and older, always follow all the instructions carefully. Make sure you know how much medicine to give and how long to use it. And use the dosing device if one is included.
- Be careful when giving your child over-the-counter cold or flu medicines and Tylenol at the same time. Many of these medicines have acetaminophen, which is Tylenol. Read the labels to make sure that you are not giving your child more than the recommended dose. Too much acetaminophen (Tylenol) can be harmful.
- Keep your child away from smoke. Smoke irritates the breathing tubes and slows healing.
- Let your child rest. Unless you see signs of dehydration, don't wake up your child during naps or at night to take fluids.

When should you call for help?



Call 911 anytime you think your child may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- Your child has severe trouble breathing. Signs may include the chest sinking in, using belly muscles to breathe, or nostrils flaring while your child is struggling to breathe.
- Your child is groggy, confused, or much more sleepy than usual.

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- Your child's fever gets worse.
- Your baby is younger than 3 months and has a fever.
- Your child gets tired during feeding because of trying to breathe. The child either stops eating or sucks in air to catch a breath. The child loses interest in eating because of the effort it takes.
- Your child has signs of needing more fluids. These signs include sunken eyes with few tears, dry mouth with little or no spit, and little or no urine for 6 hours.
- Your child starts breathing faster than usual.
- Your child uses the muscles in their neck, chest, and stomach when taking in air.

Watch closely for changes in your child's health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- Your child's symptoms get worse, or your child has any new symptoms.
- Your child does not get better as expected.

Where can you learn more?

Go to <https://www.healthwise.net/PatientEd>

Enter **R646** in the search box to learn more about "**Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) in Children: Care Instructions**".

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