

FAQS ABOUT RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS (RSV)



What is Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)?

Respiratory Syncytial Virus mainly manifests as a mild illness with cold-like symptoms in adults. It can cause pneumonia and bronchiolitis in very young children. It can be life-threatening in infants and older adults.

Why is RSV particularly bad this year?

We are experiencing an earlier-than-average surge for several reasons. Very young children born just before or during the pandemic did not benefit from regular or early exposure to common viruses, which would have helped to develop their immunity.

Why are infants and young children so vulnerable to RSV?

Nearly all children get an RSV infection by the time they are two years old. In most cases, they may experience mild, cold-like symptoms much as it does in healthy adults. But it can cause severe bronchitis or pneumonia in very young children, particularly infants and those under the age of 5.

The problem is that their small lungs and muscles can't develop the strength to cough up or sneeze out secretions and mucus within their airways, which can lead to trouble breathing.

What precautions can you take to avoid RSV?

Handwashing, staying hydrated, keeping hands away from the face, and disinfecting surfaces.

For newborns or kids under one, the best thing to do is to keep children away from adults who have been recently sick. Don't hesitate to ask people how they feel or if they have lately felt ill. Get an updated COVID booster and influenza vaccine. Anyone over six months can get a flu vaccine. The COVID bivalent booster is available for anyone five and older.

Is there an RSV Vaccine?

There is no RSV vaccine yet. There are many currently in development.

When to seek emergency care?

Hospitals, emergency rooms, and pediatric ICUs across the country have been teeming with RSV patients for weeks. So it's essential to know when to head for the ER and when it might be a better, healthier idea to stay home.

We strongly discourage people from heading to the ER to get tested for RSV or other respiratory viruses. Suppose you think you or your child has it. In that case, it's best to call your doctor or nurse rather than come into a setting that might mean a long wait or exposure to other viruses.

Healthcare professionals can go through a checklist of warning signs and make suggestions for potential at-home treatments.

They can recommend doing nasal saline drops, using a humidifier or shower, or doing other things to help loosen up mucus and decrease congestion. If it's a child older than one, they may say to try honey to help with a cough or give suggestions on how to bring down a fever.

But, it may be time to seek more intensive care when an infant or young child works extra hard to breathe. That includes flaring the nostrils, grunting as they inhale and exhale, or the skin between or below the ribs or collarbone pulls in and out.