

# RSV: Is my baby at risk?

## What is RSV?

Respiratory syncytial (*sin-SISH-uhl*) virus (RSV) is a common, easily spread virus that almost all children catch at least once by the time they turn two. It usually causes mild to moderate cold-like symptoms. In some cases, complications from RSV disease can lead to serious lung infection, breathing problems, and hospitalization.

## Is my baby at risk for contracting RSV?

Severe RSV disease is the #1 cause of hospitalizations in the US for babies under 1 year of age. RSV is present year-round but its activity typically goes up in the fall, peaks in the winter, and goes down in early spring.

## Babies at high risk for developing severe RSV disease:

**Being born early.** For premature babies ( $\leq 35$  wGA and 6 months of age or younger at the beginning of the RSV season), RSV can lead to a serious lower respiratory tract infection that requires hospitalization.

**Having chronic lung problems.** Babies 24 months or younger who have been treated for chronic lung disease of prematurity within 6 months of the start of RSV season are at high risk.

**Being born with certain types of heart disease.** Babies 24 months or younger who have been born with certain types of heart disease are also at high risk.

## Premature infants who have the following risk factors may be at high risk for developing severe RSV disease:

- **Being born early.** Babies born at less than 5.5 pounds are at high risk
- **Having preschool or school-aged siblings.** RSV is easy to catch, especially if there are other pre-school or school-aged children in the home, particularly during cold and flu season
- **Attending daycare centers.** RSV can be passed from person to person by touching common items, such as toys, bedding, towels, etc
- **Having a family history of asthma or wheezing.** There is a high risk for severe RSV disease among babies who have a family history of asthma or wheezing
- **Being around tobacco smoke or other air pollutants.** This can irritate the baby's lungs and make it harder to fight RSV disease. Never allow anyone to smoke around your baby
- **Multiple births.** Multiples are at a high risk due to their potential low birth weight and also because there are more children in the household
- **Young chronological age.** Premature babies who are 12 weeks of age or younger at the start of RSV season are at high risk
- **Crowded living conditions.** Households with many people in a small space increase the risk for RSV disease

# What are the **signs and symptoms** of RSV disease?

It's important to ask your baby's healthcare provider about symptoms to look out for, especially during your baby's first months at home.

If, at any time, you see any of these RSV disease warning signs, call your baby's healthcare provider right away:

- Coughing or wheezing that does not stop
- Fast or troubled breathing
- A fever (especially if it is greater than 100.4 °F [rectal] in infants under 3 months of age)
- A bluish color around the mouth or fingernails
- Flared nostrils and/or increased chest retractions when trying to breathe



# How can I help **protect my baby?**

Since RSV spreads just like a common cold virus, you may want to take a few extra precautions around your family and friends.

Here are some ways to help prevent your baby from being exposed during RSV season:



Wash your hands thoroughly before touching your baby, and ask others to do the same



Wash your baby's toys, clothes, and bedding often



Don't let anyone smoke in your home or near your baby



Keep your baby away from:  
— Crowds and young children  
— People with colds