

Respiratory Syncytial Virus Fact Sheet



Maine Center for Disease
Control and Prevention

An Office of the
Department of Health and Human Services

What is Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)?

RSV is caused by a virus, which infects the nose, throat, and lungs.

What are the symptoms of RSV?

RSV is a respiratory illness. Symptoms of RSV include fever, coughing, sneezing, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and wheezing. In very young infants problems breathing, fussiness, and low activity may be the only symptoms.

When is RSV season in Maine?

The RSV season is generally from October through May, usually at its highest during the end of the season.

How does RSV spread?

RSV is usually spread from person to person in droplets of coughs and sneezes. When a person coughs or sneezes the droplets can travel up to 3 feet and land on the mouth or nose of others. It is also possible to get RSV from touching a surface that has the virus on it, and then touching your own mouth or nose (or someone else's mouth or nose) before washing their hands.

Who can get RSV?

Anyone can get RSV. Almost all children will have had an RSV infection by their second birthday.

Does RSV have complications?

Yes. RSV can cause upper and lower lung infections and pneumonia. RSV can also cause difficulty breathing and may require a hospital stay to treat.

How can I prevent getting RSV?

No vaccine is currently available for RSV.

People who have cold-like symptoms should:

- Cover their coughs and sneezes
- Wash their hands often
- Avoid sharing cups and eating utensils with others
- Refrain from kissing others

Cleaning surfaces (such as doorknobs) may help stop the spread of RSV.

What are other steps that can be taken to prevent RSV?

A drug is available to prevent severe RSV illness in certain infants and children who are at high risk, but it does not treat or cure the disease.

How soon will I get sick if I am exposed to RSV?

The time from when a person is exposed to RSV virus to when symptoms begin is four to six days.

How do I find out if I have RSV?

It is hard to tell RSV from other causes of respiratory illnesses on the basis of symptoms alone. A lab test can confirm that an illness is RSV.

Can I get RSV more than once?

Yes, people of any age can get another RSV infection, but infections later in life are usually less severe.

How long is a person with RSV contagious?

People with RSV are usually contagious for three to eight days. However, some infants and people with poor immune systems can be contagious for as long as four weeks.

Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also contact Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821 or visiting the website www.maine.gov/idepi. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov/rsv> - is another excellent source of health information.