

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

What is it?

Respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, is a common lung virus. It usually causes mild to severe cold-like symptoms. Most people recover in a week or two. But, RSV can be serious, especially for infants, adults with long-term conditions, and older adults. RSV is the most common cause of bronchiolitis (inflammation of the small airways in the lung) and pneumonia (infection of the lungs). RSV is also a common reason why children younger than one are hospitalized in the United States.

How does RSV spread?

- An infected person coughs or sneezes
- Virus droplets from a cough or sneeze in your eyes, nose, or mouth
- Physical contact with the virus, like kissing the face of a child with RSV
- Touching a surface that has the virus on it, then touching your face before washing your hands

People with RSV are usually contagious for three to eight days. They may be contagious before they start showing signs of being sick. However, some infants, and people with weakened immune systems, can continue to spread the virus for weeks after they feel better. For more information, visit:

[cdc.gov/rsv](https://www.cdc.gov/rsv)

What are the signs and symptoms of RSV?



INFANTS

Fussiness
Poor feeding
Sleepiness
Apnea
(pauses in breathing)
Fever
(not always present)



CHILDREN

Runny nose
Decreased appetite
Cough
Sneezing
Fever
Trouble swallowing
Breathing changes



ADULTS

Runny nose
Sore throat
Cough
Headache
Tiredness
Congestion
Fever

Go to the nearest Emergency Department or call 911 if you or your child has:

- Noisy breathing
- Spreading out nostrils with every breath
- Blue or gray color to lips, mouth, and fingernails
- Belly breathing or "caving in" of the chest in the form of an upside-down "V" starting under the neck
- Short, shallow, slow or rapid breathing
- Pauses while breathing



How is RSV diagnosed?

A doctor will ask you about your symptoms, listen to your lungs. Your oxygen level may be checked, too.

You may get a swab test or blood sample to detect the virus or infection. You may need more tests for severe illness.

What do I do if I think I have RSV?

Most RSV infections go away on their own in a week or two.

There is no specific treatment for RSV. To relieve symptoms:

- Manage fever and pain. Use over-the-counter medications like acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Never give aspirin to children.
- Drink enough fluids. Drinking enough fluids prevents dehydration (loss of body fluids).
- Talk to your doctor before giving your child nonprescription cold medicines. Some medicines have ingredients that are not good for children.
- Use a cool mist vaporizer to soothe your nostrils and throat. Talk to your doctor first.
- Use saline nasal drops to loosen mucus in your nose.
- Blow your nose to keep your airways open. You can gently suck mucus out of your infant's nose.
- If you do not have a doctor, call **1-877-THR-WELL (1-877-847-9355)**.

How do I protect myself and others?

WASH YOUR HANDS OFTEN



KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF YOUR FACE

AVOID CLOSE CONTACT WITH SICK PEOPLE

COVER YOUR COUGHS AND SNEEZES



CLEAN AND DISINFECT SURFACES

STAY HOME WHEN YOU ARE SICK

| SYMPTOMS | COLD | FLU | CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) | RSV |
|---|--|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| HOW IT STARTS | Starts a little at a time | Starts quickly all at once | May appear 2-14 days after exposure | 3-8 days after exposure |
| HEADACHE | Rare | Common | Sometimes | Common in adults |
| FEVER | Rare | Common, lasts 3-4 days | Common | Common |
| BODY ACHES & PAINS | Sometimes | Common, often severe | Common | Rare |
| CHILLS | Rare | Common | Common | Common |
| TIREDDNESS/WEAKNESS | Sometimes | Common, can last 2-3 weeks | Common | Common |
| RUNNY/STUFFY NOSE | Common | Sometimes | Sometimes | Common |
| SNEEZING | Common | Sometimes | Rare | Common |
| SORE THROAT | Common | Sometimes | Common | Common |
| CHEST DISCOMFORT/ COUGH | Common - mild to moderate, hacking cough | Common, can be severe | Common, can be severe | Common |
| SHORTNESS OF BREATH/ PROBLEMS BREATHING | Sometimes | Sometimes | Common | Common |
| NEW LOSS OF TASTE/SMELL | Rare | Rare | Common | Rare |
| DIARRHEA/VOMITING | Rare | Sometimes (more common in children than adults) | Sometimes | Rare |
| COMPLICATIONS | Sinus congestion, ear ache | Bronchitis, pneumonia, can be life-threatening | Pneumonia, stroke, heart attack, organ failure, can be life threatening | Common for infants and older adults |
| INFECTION WITH NO SYMPTOMS | Rare | Rare | Sometimes | Rare |

SOURCES

<https://www.cdc.gov/rsv/>; <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/symptoms.htm>

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/flu-vs-covid19.htm>

<https://www.healthline.com/health-news/flu-allergies-coronavirus-different-symptoms#Despite-symptoms,-its-not-the-flu>

