



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



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Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) and Bronchiolitis

RSV: What you need to know

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) is a common virus which causes coughs and colds and is one of the most common causes of bronchiolitis in children aged under 2 years.

Most cases are not serious and clear up within 2 to 3 weeks.

RSV can be more severe in:

- Premature babies.
- Babies under 2 months.
- Vulnerable infants with underlying conditions (e.g. born prematurely or with a heart or lung condition or respiratory illness) that increase their risk of acute lower respiratory tract infection.

What are the symptoms of RSV?

The early symptoms are similar to those of a common cold, such as a runny nose and a cough and a fever. For most children RSV stays in the upper respiratory tract like any other cold.

But for a few children, further symptoms can develop over the next few days as RSV becomes a lower respiratory tract infection which is called bronchiolitis. These may include:

- Temperature.
- Rapid or noisy breathing (wheezing and whistling).
- A wet chesty sounding cough.
- Difficulty feeding.

Bronchiolitis generally gets worse for 3 days, stays the same for 3 days and then gradually improves. It is common for a cough or wheeze to continue for several weeks after your baby has had bronchiolitis, even if they seem to have otherwise recovered.

Most children do not require treatment with antibiotics. Antibiotics rarely speed up recovery and often cause side effects such as rash and diarrhoea. This will also promote the development of antibiotic resistant bacteria in your child.

Most cases of RSV are not serious, but you should contact your GP if:

- You are worried about your child,
- Your child has taken less than half their usual amount in their last 2 or 3 feeds, or they have had a dry nappy for 12 hours or more,
- Your child has a persistent high temperature of 38°C or above,
- Your child appears very tired or irritable.

Dial 999 for an Ambulance if:



Your baby is having difficulty breathing.



Your baby's lips or tongue are blue.



There are long pauses in your baby's breathing.



How can I reduce the risk of infection?

Wash your hands thoroughly

- Washing your hands often is really important in the fight against infections.

Use disposable tissues

- Throw away tissues.
- Use a new tissue each time to wipe your baby's nose or eyes.
- Use a different tissue on different parts of the face.
- Those around babies should catch their own sneezes and coughs in disposable tissues and throw them away.

Keep your baby's environment clean

- Clean toys, highchairs and worktops regularly as germs can live up to 48 hours on surfaces.
- Keep any antibacterial cleaners out of reach of children.

Avoid people who are unwell

- If your baby is at high risk, try and avoid contact with other adults and children with coldlike symptoms (runny nose, sneezing) or have a stomach upset.
- It may be difficult in the case of siblings attending nursery and school but washing hands thoroughly after nursery and school, hands over mouth when coughing and following other good hygiene advice is important.
- It might be difficult, but asking someone to stay away if they are unwell isn't being rude; people will understand this. You are helping to protect your baby's health.

Go smoke free

- Smoking is bad for the smoker and those around them.
- Babies and children are more vulnerable to the effects.
- Smoke from tobacco can make the symptoms of many illnesses much worse for young babies.
- If your baby is at a higher risk of infection, quitting smoking will really help to reduce their risk of becoming unwell.
- Quitting is not easy, but it could help to keep you and your baby healthy.
- If someone who comes into contact with your baby smokes, ask them never to smoke around your baby.

Look, don't touch

- Babies and children often attract a lot of attention.
- If someone asks or tries to touch your baby or child, but you are worried about their risk of infection, don't be afraid to ask them to look instead.
- This will help to reduce the number of possible infections for your baby and child.
- It is not rude to say, "Would you mind just having a look at her? She spent time in hospital and so she is much more vulnerable to illnesses".
- If your baby or child is particularly at risk, it's best to try to keep them away from crowds or public places.

Dial 999 for an Ambulance if:



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Your baby's lips or tongue are blue.



There are long pauses in your baby's breathing.