

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

Information for Schools and Early Care Education Sites

1. What is respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)?

Respiratory syncytial (sin-SISH-uhl) virus, or RSV, is a common respiratory virus that usually causes mild, cold-like symptoms. Most people recover in a week or two, but RSV can be serious, especially for infants, older adults and those with weakened immune systems. RSV is the most common cause of bronchiolitis (inflammation of the small airways in the lung) and pneumonia (infection of the lungs) in children younger than 1 year of age in the United States.

2. How does RSV spread?

RSV spreads when an infected person coughs or sneezes and virus droplets from the cough or sneeze get into your eyes, nose, or mouth. This can happen through direct contact with the virus, like kissing the face of a child with RSV, or by touching a surface that has virus on it and then touching your face before washing your hands. RSV can survive for many hours on hard surfaces, like tables and desks.

3. What are the symptoms of RSV?

In most people, RSV causes a mild, cold-like illness that lasts for 1-2 weeks. Symptoms usually appear 4 to 6 days after getting infected. Symptoms of RSV infection usually include: runny nose, decrease in appetite, coughing, sneezing, fever, and wheezing. Symptoms usually appear in stages and not all at once. In very young infants with RSV, the only symptoms may be irritability, decreased activity, and breathing difficulties.*

*Call your healthcare provider right away if you or your child is having difficulty breathing, not drinking enough fluids, or your symptoms are getting worse.

4. Should children and staff stay home if they are sick with RSV?

Yes. Children, students, and staff should stay home if they are feeling ill. Avoid close contact with others to prevent spreading it to others. They can return after their fever has been gone for at least 24 hours. After the fever is gone, it's common to have a lingering cough, but it is okay to return to school or the childcare center.

5. What steps can we take to prevent the spread of RSV?

To prevent the spread of RSV, and other respiratory illnesses, encourage children, students, and staff to:

- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer, especially after coughing or sneezing, using the bathroom, or before preparing food.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes. Use a tissue or your upper shirt sleeve.
- Wear a mask* that fits and filters well indoors, as masking is a great way to slow the spread of all respiratory viruses.
- Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces and objects.
- Improve airflow in indoor places at school, childcare centers, and at home.
- Stay home if feeling sick.

*Infants and children under 2 years of age should not wear a mask, and children ages 2-8 years should wear a mask only when under adult supervision.

For more information, visit:

Los Angeles County, Department of Public Health
<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/diseases/RSV.htm>
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
<https://www.cdc.gov/rsv/index.html>

