

RSV (respiratory syncytial virus)

- RSV (respiratory syncytial virus)
- [RSV immunisation for newborns](#)

RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) is a common virus that causes coughs and colds. It is the main cause of [bronchiolitis](#) and [pneumonia](#) in very young children.

It's not a new virus. Almost all children get RSV by the time they are 2 years old. It usually spreads in winter and early spring.

Most symptoms of RSV are mild, such as a runny nose, coughing and sneezing. People usually recover within 2 to 3 weeks without treatment or the need to see a GP.

But RSV can be serious for:

- babies under 1 year of age
- children aged 1 to 4 years
- children and adults with an underlying lung or heart condition
- people with a weakened immune system
- adults aged 65 years and older

[When to get medical help](#)

There is no home test for RSV. Most people only find out they have a condition caused by RSV if they are in hospital for treatment.

There is no specific medicine to treat RSV. But RSV immunisation is being introduced for newborn babies. This will help protect them from RSV over winter months.

RSV symptoms

Symptoms of an RSV infection start like a cold and can include:

- [cough](#)
- wheezing
- runny nose
- difficulty feeding or decreased appetite

- [fever \(temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or higher\)](#)
- [sore throat](#)

These symptoms usually appear in stages and not all at once.

After 4 to 5 days, babies and young children can develop bronchiolitis. Their symptoms may get worse and include:

- increased breathing (more breaths per minute)
- wheezing
- difficulty feeding or decreased appetite
- less wet nappies

These symptoms often remain for 3 to 4 days before slowly getting better. It can usually take 10 to 14 days before babies and young children recover from an RSV infection.

Many babies and children may have a cough that lasts for weeks after the start of the infection. This does not need antibiotics.


When to get medical help

You can usually [treat RSV symptoms at home](#) without needing to see a GP.

But trust your instincts. Bring your child to your GP if you are worried about them or their symptoms worsen.

Call 999 or 112 or go to your nearest emergency department (ED) if your child:

- is having visible difficulty breathing - their nostrils are getting wider as they breathe, or their ribs are sucking in
- has gone blue on their lips or tongue
- will not stay awake or wake up
- has long gaps in breathing (more than 10 seconds at a time or regular short gaps in breathing of 5 to 10 seconds)
- is breathing a lot faster than usual (more than 60 breaths per minute)
- is pale and sweaty
- has had a dry nappy for 12 hours or more

 [Find your nearest ED](#)


Go to a GP or emergency department (ED) urgently if your child

has symptoms of RSV and:

- was premature (born before 37 weeks)
- is younger than 2 months
- has heart or lung disease
- has an immune deficiency (weakened immune system)

Contact your GP if:

- you're worried about your child
- your baby has had less than 3 to 4 wet nappies in a 24 hour period
- your baby has gone 12 hours without having a wet nappy
- your baby has no energy to breastfeed, or if they are refusing to feed. Or if your baby is too breathless to attach to your breast
- you are bottle feeding and you notice your baby is taking less than half of what they would normally take
- your child has a [temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or higher](#) that does not settle or improve
- your child seems short of breath
- your child has no energy or is irritable

 [Find a GP](#)

 [Find a GP out of hours](#)

Adults at higher risk


RSV can be serious if you:

- have a weakened immune system
- are aged 65 or older

Call 999 or 112 or go to your nearest emergency department if you:

- are having difficulty breathing
- go blue on your lips or tongue
- can not stay awake or wake up
- have long gaps in breathing (more than 10 seconds at a time or regular short gaps in breathing of 5 to 10 seconds)
- are breathing a lot faster than usual (more than 60 breaths per minute)
- are pale and sweaty
- have heart or lung disease and symptoms of RSV

- have a weakened immune system and symptoms of RSV

 [Find your nearest ED](#)

[Prevent the spread of RSV and protect people at risk](#)

Treating RSV symptoms at home

There is no specific medicine to treat RSV.

But most symptoms are mild. You can usually treat them at home.

Ask your pharmacist for advice on commonly available medicines that can help treat symptoms, such as a cold or a cough.

Do

- ✓ keep your child home from school, childcare and other activities if they are not well enough to attend
- ✓ trust your instincts. Bring your child to your GP if you are worried about them or their symptoms worsen
- ✓ check on your child often, day and night
- ✓ give your child as much chance to rest as possible
- ✓ keep them upright to help them breathe and feed
- ✓ offer your child their usual milk feeds - they may need to take smaller amounts more often
- ✓ give your child extra water or fruit juice to stop them getting dehydrated
- ✓ keep the air moist - making your home too warm will dry out the air

Don't

- ✗ do not let anyone smoke around your child - it will make their symptoms worse

Prevent the spread of RSV

RSV is very common and spreads easily in coughs and sneezes.

RSV immunisation is being introduced for newborn babies. This will help protect them from RSV over winter months.

There are things you can do to lessen the chances of catching or spreading RSV.

You can teach older children to do some of these themselves.

Do

- ✓ keep your child home from school, childcare and other activities if they are not well enough to attend
- ✓ [wash their hands properly and regularly](#)
- ✓ always carry tissues and cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when they cough or sneeze
- ✓ cough or sneeze into your bent elbow if you do not have a tissue and wash your hands after
- ✓ put used tissues in the bin and wash your hands after
- ✓ make sure [your child's vaccines or immunisations](#) are up to date, including the annual [nasal flu vaccine](#)

Don't

- ✗ do not share water bottles, cups, glasses or anything else your child puts to their mouth
- ✗ do not be in close contact with people who have cold or flu symptoms
- ✗ do not touch your eyes or nose when you are unwell
- ✗ do not have close contact with people more at risk of viruses if you or your child is unwell



Dabbing helps teach your child good hygiene when sneezing

Some parents teach older children to 'dab' when they sneeze. Dabbing is a dance move in which a child drops their head into their bent elbow.

This can be a fun way for your child to learn good hygiene when sneezing.

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