

More Children May Be At Risk For Seasonal Virus Than Previously Believed

(NAPSA)—As we enter the fall and winter months, parents should be aware of a common, seasonal virus called respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV. While symptoms in most children are mild, RSV disease is the leading cause of hospitalizations in infants under 1 year of age in the United States. A recent study showed that RSV disease accounts for inpatient hospital stays for one out of every 334 hospitalizations and one of every 38 emergency department visits for children under 5 years of age.

Premature babies and those with certain medical conditions are generally considered to be at high risk for severe RSV disease. But parents should know that the incidence of RSV disease in children up to the age of 5 is greater than previously thought, according to data published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

“Virtually all children will be infected with RSV by the age of 2,” says Caroline B. Hall, M.D., professor of pediatrics and medicine in infectious disease at the University of Rochester Medical Center. “These data simply suggest that parents should be aware that, during the fall and winter months, RSV is in the community and they should protect their children from RSV, especially if they have a premature infant.”

What is RSV?

RSV is a virus that usually causes cold-like symptoms. RSV recurs yearly and can be contracted more than once over a child's lifetime. Most babies exposed are able to fight the virus off, but up to 125,000 infants go to the hospital each year in the United States because of RSV.

Are all children at risk?

Although all children can contract RSV, premature birth, being born with certain heart conditions or having chronic lung disease may increase your child's risk of severe RSV disease.

Other RSV risk factors for premature infants include close contact with other young children, at daycare or in a home with older siblings and exposure to tobacco

smoke and other air pollutants that can irritate your baby's lungs and make it more difficult to fight off the virus.

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—Caroline B. Hall, M.D.

How can you tell if your baby has RSV?

“RSV symptoms are similar to the common cold, such as fever and a runny nose, and can be difficult to distinguish,” said Dr. Hall. “Parents should be aware of RSV symptoms and of the routine precautions that could help protect their child.”

Parents should look for the following symptoms of severe RSV disease and consult a healthcare professional if any are present:

Respiratory symptoms accompanied by:

- Fever (in infants under 3 months of age, a fever greater than 100.4°F rectal is cause for concern)
- Persistent coughing or wheezing
- Rapid, difficult or labored breathing
- Unusual lethargy, tiredness
- Decreased intake of liquids

What can you do to help protect your child?

Just like the cold and flu, RSV spreads easily on hands and lives on common surfaces, such as countertops and tissues. Therefore, it is important to keep other children and adults who have colds with coughing and sneezing away from your baby. You can also help prevent the spread of RSV by cleaning your baby's toys and personal items used by others and asking those who touch your baby to wash their hands or use hand sanitizer gels.

The RSV season usually occurs from late fall to spring in most of the country, but the onset varies in different parts of the United States.

For further information on the length of the RSV season where you live, and steps you can take to avoid RSV, ask your baby's doctor.

You can also learn more online at www.rsvprotection.com.