

HEALTH ALERT

Parents: Your Baby May Still Be At Risk For A Serious Respiratory Virus

(NAPSA)—As warmer months approach, parents may be relieved that the dreaded cold and flu season has nearly passed. But at least one virus can still pose a serious threat. Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), a common virus that usually causes coldlike symptoms in adults and children, can have serious consequences for high-risk infants.

Most babies exposed to RSV are able to fight the virus off on their own, but up to 125,000 infants go to the hospital each year in the United States because of RSV. Babies who are born prematurely are particularly likely to be hospitalized for RSV because their lungs may not have fully developed. RSV can also contribute to long-term health problems such as asthma. In extreme cases, RSV can be life threatening.

In most of North America, the typical RSV season begins in the late fall and lasts four to five months; however, RSV outbreaks can vary locally and from year to year. This means that some areas of the country will continue to see RSV at epidemic levels beyond the cold winter months and into the warm, moist spring.

What can you do to protect your child?

Like cold germs and flu viruses, RSV spreads easily through touching, kissing, sneezing and

Symptoms Of RSV

- Persistent coughing or wheezing
- Rapid, difficult or gasping breaths
- Blue color on the lips, around the mouth or under the fingernails
- A temperature of more than 100.4 degrees



coughing, and can live for several hours on countertops and in used tissues. Even though RSV is transmitted easily, you can take a number of simple steps to minimize your child's exposure to it:

- Always wash your hands before touching your baby, and make sure others do, too.
- Wash toys and bedding frequently.
- Shield your baby from tobacco smoke, people with colds and unnecessary exposure to crowds.
- Don't share your child's personal items, such as pacifiers, utensils, toothbrushes or towels, with other children.

How can you tell if your baby has RSV?

RSV usually causes symptoms that mimic a cold, such as a runny nose or a low fever. These symptoms will generally run their course, just like a cold. However, parents should be aware of the following symptoms that could be signs of severe RSV:

- Persistent coughing or wheezing
- Rapid, difficult or gasping breaths
- Blue color on the lips, around the mouth or under the fingernails
- A temperature of more than 100.4 degrees.

"Parents can protect their children from potentially serious consequences by knowing the symptoms of RSV and the steps they can take to prevent it," said Michael Light, M.D., pediatric pulmonologist and professor of clinical pediatrics at Miller School of Medicine at the University of Miami.

What puts babies at risk for severe RSV?

Premature birth, being born with lung disease or congenital heart disease, or low birth weight can all increase your child's risk of severe RSV infection. So can contact with other kids, either at day care or in a home with siblings. Tobacco smoke and other air pollutants can irritate your baby's lungs and make it harder to fight off the virus.

The RSV season usually runs from fall to spring with significant variability based on geography. To best understand the length of the RSV season where you live and steps you can take to avoid RSV, ask your baby's doctor.