



# RSV infection

Information about RSV and how you can reduce the risk of your child developing a severe infection.

abbvie

# What is RSV?

RSV is one of the most common respiratory viruses and is spread easily. By the age of two, virtually all children have had an RSV infection at some time. Most children will just develop a cold, but RSV can sometimes cause a much more serious condition with an infection in the lungs.

RSV, which is an abbreviation for respiratory syncytial virus, attacks a specific type of cell in the airways. It causes infected cells to fuse together and form what is known as syncytia. This can cause the lining of the airways to swell with excessive mucus production. With a lower respiratory tract infection, the swelling and the thick, sticky mucus make it more difficult for the child to breathe.

Each year, the number of cases of RSV reaches epidemic proportions all over the world. In Sweden, RSV is primarily spread during the cold months of the year. The season can start as early as October and last far into spring. The intensity and length of the RSV season varies from year to year, and local differences across the country are common.



In Sweden, RSV is primarily spread during the winter months.



RSV is spread primarily through physical contact with someone who is infected.



## How is RSV spread?

RSV is highly contagious. It is spread primarily through direct physical contact with someone who is infected, for example by holding hands, kissing or hugging.

RSV can survive up to six hours on hard surfaces such as tables, books or door handles. It survives for a shorter period of time on textiles and on skin. Thus, a child could get infected indirectly by borrowing toys from someone who is infected. For infection to occur, the virus must come in contact with the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose or mouth. This can occur, for example, by a child getting RSV on their hands and then rubbing their eyes, picking their nose, or putting their fingers in their mouth.

Although airborne spread of RSV is not considered to be a huge risk, the virus can be spread through a cloud of very small drops of liquid if someone coughs or sneezes while standing really close.

## Is my child at risk of becoming infected?

Anyone – whether child or adult – can become infected. More than half of all children have been infected with the virus during their first year of life, and most children have had one or more RSV infections by the age of two. Because of this, the body has built up some immunity against RSV, and future RSV infections are usually much milder.

RSV can sometimes cause more serious symptoms. One to three percent of all infants become so seriously ill that they need hospitalisation.



If your child is under six months of age and suffers from a cold with severe coughing and difficulty breathing, or shows signs of weakness and dehydration, contact the nearest emergency room.

For an initial assessment of an older child, you can contact a paediatric clinic, medical centre, or urgent care centre.

# How can I recognise an RSV infection?

An RSV infection normally presents itself as a mild cold with runny nose and cough, often with thick and sticky mucus. The child may be more tired than usual and have less of an appetite, but might not have a fever. In most cases, the child will recover without any complications.

In addition to cold symptoms, newborns and otherwise healthy infants in their first few months of life may also become ill with pneumonia with respiratory distress, which may require hospitalisation. In some cases oxygen therapy is required, or even use of a feeding tube if the child cannot eat on their own.

## Signs of a more serious RSV infection:

- The child has difficulty breathing
- Rapid breathing with a wheezing sound
- Decreased energy that affects their desire to eat and drink
- Disinterest in their surroundings, lethargy
- Laboured cough
- Thick, sticky mucus in the nose and airways
- High fever

Very young children, especially those born prematurely, may exhibit cold symptoms and impaired general condition in the form of apnoeas (pauses in breathing), which require immediate hospitalisation.

## Some groups of children are more vulnerable

In addition to infants, groups at greatest risk of suffering from a serious and prolonged bout of RSV are children born prematurely, children with certain heart and lung diseases, and children with Down's syndrome or neuromuscular disease.

## Does RSV cause any permanent damage?

A young child who has had a severe RSV infection may continue to have breathing difficulties during colds for years after the infection.

**It is important to try to protect newborns and infants up through at least their first six months of life.**

**Children belonging to any of the risk groups must be protected for at least their first year of life.**





Protect vulnerable children from infection whenever possible.



It is not possible to completely protect against RSV, but it is possible to reduce the risk of infection. Be sure to protect the most vulnerable so they hopefully do not get sick when they are really young.

# What can I do to protect my child against infection during RSV season?

- The best way to prevent the spread of infection is to wash your hands really well with soap and water. It is a good idea to use hand disinfectant afterwards as well.
- Teach older siblings who go to daycare to wash their hands really well.
- Avoid contact with children and adults who have a cold, and be careful with close contact, e.g. kisses, when you have a cold.
- If you can, breast-feed or give the child breast milk in a bottle.
- Give the child a smoke-free environment.
- If family or friends come for a visit, ask them to avoid close contact if they have a cold. It is best to put off the visit until they are healthy.
- Cough and sneeze into the crook of your arm.
- Regularly wipe off surfaces such as sinks, tables and toys.
- Try to choose parent-and-child group activities where you meet up outdoors. Be careful with indoor activities, like “open preschool”, where there are a lot of young children who play near each other and with the same toys.
- Be careful if taking your child to places where there are a lot of people. Airborne infection is not a huge risk when it comes to spreading RSV, except if your child is near someone when they cough or sneeze. It is mainly lack of good hand hygiene by others that poses a risk since someone with a cold could transmit the infection via surfaces like shopping trolley handles, handrails on buses or trains, etc.

## Is there any medicine against RSV?

There is no vaccine or direct-acting antiviral drug for RSV, but there are many drug trials being conducted to develop an effective vaccine that could prevent the illness.

The only preventive treatment against RSV infection today is directly-transmitted antibodies (called passive immunisation). This is only intended for a small group of children with complicated factors that make them particularly vulnerable to an RSV infection. It is the treating doctor who makes the medical decision as to whether a child needs special care with preventive treatment.



# How can I ease my child's symptoms?

There is no medicine to cure an RSV infection. Antibiotics have no effect. But, there is a lot you can do to ease your child's symptoms.

- Make sure that your child drinks a lot of fluids to help prevent dehydration and to loosen up the thick, sticky mucus.
- It is a good idea to use a nasal spray with saline to keep the nose clear. Using decongestant nasal drops, as directed, will make breathing easier.
- For a young child who cannot blow their own nose, carefully use a nasal aspirator, which can be purchased at a pharmacy.
- If you are able, breast-feed or give the child breast milk in a bottle.
- Raise the head end of the crib or bed to reduce swelling in the mucous membranes. If you can, let your child rest in an upright position for a while.
- It is a good idea to keep the room cool.
- If your child has a fever, you can give them a fever-reducing over-the-counter medicine, following the recommended dosage.



Pay attention to any signs that may indicate dehydration or increased breathing difficulties.

# Read more about RSV

If you would like to learn more about RSV (in Swedish), visit [rsvirus.se](https://rsvirus.se). You can also tell family and friends about the virus, so they can learn more about what they can do to reduce the risk of infection.

## rsvirus.se





# RSV infection

## Sometimes more than just a cold

In this brochure, you can read more about RSV (respiratory syncytial virus), including information on how it is spread, symptoms of infection, and what you should do to protect your child against infection.



This brochure is available for downloading/printing in PDF format at [www.rsvirus.se](http://www.rsvirus.se) under the tab marked "Broschyr".

**AbbVie AB, Box 1523, 171 29 Solna, Sweden | [www.rsvirus.se](http://www.rsvirus.se)**