

## Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV): What Parents Should Know

Respiratory syncytial (RES-pri-tor-ee sin-SISH-shul VYE-ris) virus, or RSV, is a common illness affecting high-risk people, especially premature babies. By age 2, most children have had or been exposed to RSV. RSV is very contagious.

Prematurity is one of the leading risks to getting RSV. RSV causes about 90,000 hospitalizations and 4,500 deaths in children under age 5 each year. RSV is often mistaken for a cold, but RSV is 10 times more deadly than the flu.

There are times of the year when your baby has more chance of being around people with the virus. This is usually from fall through spring (October through April or May). RSV can cause a mild cold, or it can lead to a more serious sickness and a stay in the hospital. Those at highest risk include:

- Children more than 4 weeks premature at birth or weighed less than 5½ pounds at birth
- Twins or other multiple births
- Children younger than 2 years born with lung or heart disease
- Brothers and sisters who attend school and/or day care
- Children who live in a crowded home environment
- Children with a family history of asthma or exposed to tobacco smoke or air pollutants

The reason that RSV is dangerous for premature babies is that they do not have fully developed airways. Premies do not have immunity to help fight off RSV and other viruses because they were born early.

### Symptoms of RSV

RSV usually causes a mild cold with a runny nose and fever. However, RSV also can make your baby very sick. Call your doctor right away if your baby has any of these symptoms:

- Cough that does not go away, gets worse, or produces “colored” mucus
- Wheezing (a high-pitched whistling sound when breathing)
- Trouble breathing or breathing faster than usual; your baby may have a blue color of lips or around the mouth
- High fever
- Runny nose with mucous that is yellow, green, or grey

Synagis (palivizumab) is an injection, not a vaccine, but it helps to prevent or lessen the symptoms of RSV. If your baby is at risk for infection, the shot should be given 1-3 days before your baby leaves the hospital. It is very important that the shots start by mid October and continue every month throughout the season. It must be given every 28-30 days, and skipping or delaying doses puts your baby at more risk of getting RSV. Research has shown that dosing should follow the guidelines and risk factors below:

<b>Indication</b>	<b>Age of Child (at start of RSV season)</b>	<b>Dosing</b>
Chronic Lung Disease requiring medical management	Less than 24 months	Monthly during RSV season
Born before 28 weeks	Less than 12 months	Monthly during RSV season
Born between 28 and 32 weeks	Less than 6 months	Monthly during RSV season
Born between 32 and 35 weeks	Less than 6 months (with provider determined risks)	Monthly during RSV season
Congenital Heart Disease	Less than 24 months (unless cardiology waiver obtained)	Monthly during RSV season
Neuromuscular Disease	Less than 24 months	Monthly during RSV season
Congenital Abnormalities of the Airways	Less than 24 months	Monthly during RSV season
Immune Disorders	Less than 24 months (unless infectious disease or immunology waiver obtained)	Monthly during RSV season

Ask your baby’s healthcare provider (physician or nurse practitioner) if your baby is needs the medicine for RSV. If your baby gets RSV, remember that he or she still needs the medicine to help prevent another RSV infection after they get better. You will need to make sure your baby gets the shots each month. Make your follow-up appointment before your baby leaves the hospital, and be sure to tell your baby’s provider the date your baby received the last dose. It is important that the next dose be given on time for the medication to be effective.

Keep track of the date the shots were given until RSV season is over.

Write down when your baby gets this medicine and any follow-up care needed:

Dose in Hospital given: \_\_\_\_\_

2nd dose: \_\_\_\_\_

3rd dose: \_\_\_\_\_

4th dose: \_\_\_\_\_

5th dose: \_\_\_\_\_

References:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2013). Respiratory syncytial virus infection (RSV). Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/rsv>

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