Tips to Prevent Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a common illness that affects the airways. In older children and teens, RSV is often mild with cold-like symptoms. In babies and children under age 5, RSV can be very serious. In this handout, learn tips on how to prevent RSV.

What is respiratory syncytial virus?

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a common illness that affects the airways (nose, throat, airways and lungs). In older children and adults, RSV can be mild and causes cold-like symptoms. In babies and young children, RSV can be very serious. RSV is most common in the fall and winter months.

How is RSV spread?

RSV is spread through droplets from the mouth or nose in the following ways:

- If a person with RSV coughs, sneezes or blows their nose near you
- Touching, kissing or shaking hands with someone who has RSV
- Touching shared surfaces or objects also touched by someone with RSV, such as a doorknob or toys

RSV can spread quickly through enclosed, shared spaces, such as day care centers, schools or crowded households.

Who is more likely to develop severe RSV?

The following are more likely to develop severe RSV:

- Babies and children who are under age 5
- Babies and children who have weakened immune systems (system in the body that fights germs and illnesses)
- Babies and children who have chronic (long-term) lung conditions or congenital (present at birth) heart and/or lung disease
- Premature babies born before their due date
How can I prevent RSV?

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water. Scrub your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds before rinsing. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Keep your hands away from your face, nose and mouth.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the inside of your elbow. Wash your hands after you cough or sneeze. Throw the used tissue in the trash.
- Clean high-touch surfaces (surfaces that are touched often and by multiple people). This can include doorknobs, counters and toys.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who has RSV or another illness.
- Limit time spent in crowded or shared spaces, such as day care, grocery shopping or indoor shopping areas.
- If possible, stay home if you or your child are sick.

What is palivizumab?

**Palivizumab (Synagis®)** is a medication used to lessen the chance of babies and children developing severe RSV. It can also help prevent serious complications (medical concerns that occur during diagnosis or after a procedure or treatment) from RSV. It is given as an injection every month between November and April when RSV is more common. **Palivizumab does not treat RSV.**

Who can receive palivizumab to prevent RSV?

Palivizumab is reserved for babies under 6 months of age and children who are at high risk of developing severe RSV. This included babies and children with any of the following:

- Chronic lung conditions
- Congenital heart and/or lung conditions
- Weakened immune system
- Down syndrome
- Born prematurely