

# Winter Illness and RSV

## Information for parents and caregivers

Update – 26 July 2021

### General information on RSV

Colds, flu and other respiratory viruses including respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) are more common at this time of year in schools, early learning centres and homes. These winter illnesses can be easily spread by sneezes or cough droplets. For most adults and older children an RSV infection will be like a cold. Most people take about 10 days to recover and will get better on their own. Very young children and babies can become seriously ill and require urgent medical care and hospitalisation.

**RSV infections may progress to cause pneumonia and bronchiolitis, especially in infants.**

To stop the spread of RSV and other viruses, everyone should maintain good hand hygiene and stay home if they have any cold or flu symptoms.

### Symptoms

If you or your child has RSV, the most common symptoms are:

- a runny nose
- coughing or sneezing
- fever
- wheezing and difficulty breathing
- loss of appetite, or
- difficulty feeding due to breathlessness.

**Shortness of breath or abnormally rapid breathing always requires immediate medical attention.**

In very young infants, the symptoms may be subtle: irritability or decreased activity may be the only signs your child is unwell. Breathing difficulties indicate there is inflammation in the airways caused by a viral infection.

### When do I need to see a doctor if my baby or child has respiratory symptoms?

- is under 3 months old
- is breathing fast, has noisy breathing and is having to use extra effort to breathe
- looks pale and unwell
- is taking less than half of their normal feeds
- is vomiting
- has not had a wet nappy for more than six hours.

***Even if you've already seen your doctor, if your child's breathing gets worse or you are worried, take your child back to the doctor.***

### When should I dial 111?

Dial 111 and ask for urgent medical help if your baby or young child:

- has blue lips and tongue
- has severe difficulty breathing
- breathing that is not regular, or pauses in breathing
- is becoming very sleepy and not easy to wake up
- is very pale or floppy.

## Additional information for parents and caregivers

- anyone who is unwell should stay at home until they are symptom free and feeling well. Your child should not return to childcare, school or work until 24 hours after their symptoms (cough, runny nose) have gone
- inform a member of staff at your childcare centre if your child has an illness
- make sure you are aware of your centre's illness policy and ensure your centre has your contact details should they need to contact you
- a medical certificate from your GP is not required before your child returns to early childhood education (ECE), childcare, kindergarten, or school after they have been unwell, unless they are not fully recovered
- the following links have some good tips for looking after children with winter illnesses:
  - [www.kidshealth.org.nz/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv-infection](http://www.kidshealth.org.nz/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv-infection)
  - [www.kidshealth.org.nz/flu-influenza](http://www.kidshealth.org.nz/flu-influenza)
  - [www.kidshealth.org.nz/cough-children](http://www.kidshealth.org.nz/cough-children)
  - [www.kidshealth.org.nz/bronchiolitis](http://www.kidshealth.org.nz/bronchiolitis)

## RSV prevention poster

Accessible at [www.healthnavigator.org.nz/media/14170/preventing-the-spread-of-rsv.pdf](http://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/media/14170/preventing-the-spread-of-rsv.pdf)

# Help prevent the spread of RSV

Stay home when you are sick.



Limit the time children spend in childcare.

Cough or sneeze into your elbow or cover your mouth and nose with a tissue.



Wash your hands with soap and water often.



Wash solid toys and consider getting rid of soft ones.



Clean surfaces such as doorknobs and mobile phones often.



Avoid close contact with others.



Health Navigator  
NEW ZEALAND

For more info, visit [hn.org.nz/rsv](http://hn.org.nz/rsv)