

RSV

FAST FACTS



Q: What is RSV?

Respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, is a common respiratory virus that causes cold-like symptoms. Almost all children will get RSV by the time they are two years old. Although most cases are mild, it can also cause severe illness, including bronchiolitis and pneumonia.

The virus is a leading cause of infant hospitalization. In fact, two to three out of every 100 infants under 3 months are hospitalized with RSV each year.¹

Q: Who is at risk for RSV?

Infants are especially vulnerable to severe RSV illness because their immune systems are still developing and their airways are smaller. Those at the highest risk include babies who are:

- Under 6 months old
- Premature
- Diagnosed with chronic lung or heart conditions

Infants can remain at risk of RSV even outside of the typical season.

Q: When are babies most at risk?

RSV season typically starts in the fall, peaks in the winter, and ends in the spring. However, the timing and severity of each RSV season can vary from year to year. Infants can remain at risk even outside of the typical season.

To protect infants from RSV complications, expecting mothers should talk with their clinician to decide which RSV immunization is most appropriate.

RSV AT A GLANCE



Two to three out of every 100 infants under 3 months are hospitalized with RSV each year.



Preterm babies are **three times more likely²** to die from the virus than those that are full term.



Almost all children will get RSV by the time they are two years old.

Q: What are the symptoms of RSV?

RSV symptoms are similar to the flu or a cold, such as coughing or a runny nose. Other symptoms may include:



Fussiness or irritability



Decreased interest in activities



Changes in appetite

Symptoms of severe RSV include:



Shortness of breath



Wheezing



Blue or gray lips or nails



Chest retractions



Flared nostrils

Any of these severe symptoms indicate an infant is in respiratory distress and require immediate medical attention.

Q: What do chest retractions look like?

Infants who are struggling to breathe may experience chest retractions as they try to get more oxygen. When this happens, an infant's chest will sink in just below the neck, under the breastbone or between the ribs with each breath.



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Q: Can RSV be prevented?

Safe, effective prevention options exist to protect infants from severe RSV infection and reduce the risk of hospitalization. The two ways to protect babies from RSV include:³

- **Maternal RSV vaccine:** Expecting mothers between 32 and 36 weeks of pregnancy can receive a single dose. Vaccination during this window allows protective antibodies to pass to the baby, helping provide early defense against RSV. If the mother receives the vaccine, most babies do not also need infant RSV antibodies.

- **Infant preventive monoclonal antibody:** If the mother did not receive the RSV vaccine or if the baby was born within 14 days of maternal vaccination, the infant can receive the RSV antibody within the first week of life, ideally before leaving the hospital after birth. Infants can also receive this antibody at their pediatrician's office.

Safe, effective prevention options exist to protect infants from severe RSV infection.

RSV PREVENTION OPTIONS FOR INFANTS

	Maternal Vaccine	Infant Preventive Monoclonal Antibody (Nirsevimab)	Infant Preventive Monoclonal Antibody (Clesrovimab)
Approved for:	Pregnant women for the protection of infants	All infants born during or entering their first RSV season AND Children up to 24 months of age who remain at risk of severe RSV disease through their second RSV season	All infants born during or entering their first RSV season
Administered:	During 32 weeks through 36 weeks of pregnancy at a health care provider's office or pharmacy	In the hospital after birth before discharge OR In a health care provider's office	In the hospital after birth before discharge OR In a health care provider's office

Additional measures that can help prevent RSV include:



Practicing good hygiene such as regular hand washing



Disinfecting toys and surfaces



Avoiding large gatherings



Avoiding individuals who are sick

Sources:

1. CDC. RSV in Infants and Young Children. February 20, 2026. <https://www.cdc.gov/rsv/infants-young-children/index.html>
2. March of Dimes. Preterm babies are at a higher risk for RSV. October 27, 2021. <https://www.marchofdimes.org/find-support/blog/preterm-babies-are-higher-risk-rsv>
3. CDC. Immunizations to Protect Infants. August 18, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/rsv/vaccines/protect-infants.html>



The National Coalition for Infant Health is a collaborative of professional, clinical, community and family support organizations.

The coalition focuses on education and advocacy promoting patient-centered care for all infants—whether born preterm or full term—and their families.

infanthealth.org

