What You Need to Know About Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

What is RSV?

RSV is a common, seasonal virus contracted by nearly 100 percent of infants by the age of 2. RSV occurs in epidemics, typically from November through March in most of the U.S., but the "RSV season" can vary by geography and from year to year.

In many babies, the virus leads to a mild respiratory infection with symptoms similar to the common cold or flu, but in some it can develop into a much more serious infection. In fact, severe RSV disease:

- Is the **leading cause of hospitalization** for babies during their first year of life in the United States
- Causes approximately **125,000 hospitalizations** and **up to 400 infant deaths** each year in the United States
- Results in up to **10 times as many infant deaths** each year than the flu
- Is responsible for **one of every 13 pediatrician visits** and **one of every 38 trips** to the ER in children under the age of five

Which babies are at highest risk of developing severe RSV disease?

While every baby is at risk of contracting RSV, babies born prematurely – earlier than 37 weeks gestation – are at increased risk for developing severe RSV disease. In fact, preterm infants are **twice as likely** as full-term infants to be admitted to the hospital for RSV-related symptoms.

- Because they were not able to fully develop in their mother's womb, preterm infants are born with underdeveloped lungs (narrow and fragile airways), putting them at increased risk of chronic lung problems and respiratory infections.
- Additionally, preemies did not receive the full amount of infection-fighting antibodies that are transferred in utero, so they are not as well-equipped to help fight off infections as full-term babies.

Unfortunately, **more than a half million babies** in the U.S. are born prematurely each year, so it's important that parents are aware of the dangers that RSV presents to preemies. In addition to preterm infants, children with congenital heart disease and chronic lung disease of prematurity are often at high risk for developing severe RSV disease.

What are the symptoms of severe RSV disease?

Potential signs of severe RSV disease that parents should not ignore include:

- Coughing or wheezing that does not stop
- Fast or troubled breathing
- Spread-out nostrils and/or a caved-in chest when trying to breathe
- Bluish color around the mouth or fingernails
- Fever (especially if it is over 100.4°F (rectal) in infants under 3 months of age)

Can RSV be prevented?

There is currently no treatment for RSV infection, so **prevention is critical**. All parents – and especially parents of high-risk babies – should learn steps they can take to help protect their children from contracting RSV.

Preventive methods include:

- Wash your hands and ask others to do the same
- Keep toys, clothes, blankets, and sheets clean
- Avoid crowds and being around people, including young children, who may be sick during RSV season
- Ask your child's pediatrician if he or she may be at high-risk and ways you can protect a high-risk baby

Where can I learn more about RSV?

Visit **www.RSVprotection.com** for more information, including:

- Tips on talking to your pediatrician about your child's risk factors
- Data about the RSV season in your area
- Real stories of family's experiences with RSV

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