

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a common cause of coughs and colds. It usually gets better by itself, but it can be serious for some babies and older adults.

Who's at risk from RSV

RSV is very common. Almost all children get it at least once before they're 2 years old.

It's not usually serious, but some babies and adults have a higher risk of getting seriously ill, particularly:

- babies under 6 months old
- children who were born prematurely
- adults over 75 years
- babies, children and older adults with a weakened immune system, or long-term lung or heart conditions
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In babies, RSV is a common cause of a type of chest infection called [bronchiolitis](#). This can cause breathing problems and may need to be treated in hospital.

RSV can also cause a serious lung infection ([pneumonia](#)) in babies and older adults.

How to avoid catching and spreading RSV

RSV is spread in the coughs and sneezes of someone who has the virus.

There are some things you can do to reduce your chances of getting it or spreading it to anyone else, such as:

- wash your hands and your child's hands often
- wash or wipe down toys and clean surfaces regularly
- avoid sharing things like cutlery and cups
- use disposable tissues and throw them away as soon as you've used them
- keep newborn babies away from anyone with a cold or the flu – especially if they were born prematurely or have serious health conditions

Treatment for children at risk of serious infections

Children who have a very high risk of getting seriously ill from RSV may be given treatment in the winter (between October and March) to help reduce the risk of RSV causing severe bronchiolitis.

RSV vaccination from September 2024

A vaccine to help protect against RSV will be available on the NHS from 1 September 2024.

You'll be able to get the vaccine if:

- you're aged 75 to 79
- you're 28 weeks pregnant or more – this will help protect your baby for the first few months after they're born

If you're aged 75 to 79, your GP surgery will contact you about getting vaccinated. Please wait to be contacted.

From September, you can speak to your maternity service or GP surgery about getting your RSV vaccination if you're 28 weeks pregnant or more.

Symptoms of RSV

Symptoms of RSV usually start within a few days of getting infected.

Most people only get cold-like symptoms, such as:

- a runny or blocked nose
- sneezing
- a cough
- tiredness
- a high temperature – signs include your back or chest feeling hotter than usual, sweatiness and shivering (chills)

Babies with RSV may also be irritable and feed less than usual.

If RSV leads to a more serious infection (such as bronchiolitis) it may also cause:

- a cough that gets worse
- faster breathing or long gaps between breaths
- difficulty feeding or eating
- noisy breathing (wheezing)