



Cedar Park Pediatric & Family Medicine

Complete Medical Care for your Family

What is RSV?

RSV, or respiratory syncytial virus, is a common virus that causes bronchiolitis in infants and cold symptoms in older children and adults. Almost every child has had RSV by the time they are 2 years old.

How is it spread?

RSV is spread by contact with an infected person's mucous or saliva. The best way to prevent this spread is by frequent hand washing and avoiding touching your face. Most people become sick about 4-6 days after they are exposed. People who are infected with RSV are usually contagious for 3-8 days.

Bronchiolitis

Bronchiolitis is an infection (caused by RSV and other viruses) that causes inflammation and swelling of the small airways (bronchioles) in the lungs. It occurs mostly in children under one year of age. Usually bronchiolitis begins with a runny nose, mild cough, and sometimes fever. After a day or two the cough worsens and the child may have more difficulty breathing. Usually days 3-5 of the illness are the worst and improvement begins after that. The runny nose usually improves first, but the cough can last for about 2 weeks.

What to watch for

Some children will show signs of increased difficulty with breathing such as flaring the nostrils, breathing faster, making wheezing noises, or sucking in around the rib cage with each breath. If any of these occur, your child ought to be seen by their pediatrician. The other primary thing to watch for is dehydration. Signs that your child may be dehydrated include decreased wet diapers, dry mouth, and crying without making tears. Call your pediatrician if any of these occur.

What can be done to treat RSV?

Unfortunately, there is no specific treatment for RSV or the other viruses that cause bronchiolitis. One of the most helpful things that can be done is suctioning your baby's nose with a bulb after placing a few drops of saline in each nostril to loosen the mucous. This is especially important before bedtime and feeding. Using a humidifier and propping up the head of the bed can also make it easier to breathe while sleeping. Your child will likely take smaller amounts of fluid with each feed and need more frequent feedings. Some children who have wheezing with RSV will improve with breathing treatments and others will not. About 1-2% of infants with RSV do have to be hospitalized every year for oxygen or IV fluids, but most children recover well with close monitoring at home.

Dr. Lee Keegan is a board certified pediatrician with Cedar Park Pediatric and Family Medicine.

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Phone: 512-336-2777

345 Cypress Creek Rd. Ste. 104 - Cedar Park, TX 78613

920 N. Vista Ridge, Ste. 500 – Cedar Park, TX 78613

www.CedarParkDoctors.com