



RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS

(sin-ci-te-al)

The St Helena Health Service is currently seeing high volumes of unwell children at the Hospital - all showing symptoms of Respiratory Syncytial Virus. The virus spreads easily and large numbers of children from the same crèches and environments are presenting to the Hospital.

In light of this St Helena Government is offering the following information and guidance:

Respiratory syncytial (sin-ci-te-al) virus, or RSV, is a respiratory virus that infects the lungs and breathing passages.

Healthy people usually experience mild, cold-like symptoms and recover in a week or two. **But RSV can be serious, especially for infants and older adults.**

The younger the child the more it is affected by the virus. **Infants under 6 months old in particular can get seriously ill.** The virus produces a thick mucus, which is difficult for the child to cough up.

Antibiotics are ineffective because this is a virus and it **DOES NOT** respond to antibiotics.

How is it contracted?

RS Virus is spread when droplets from a cough or a sneeze come into contact with the eyes mouth or nose **OR** when someone touches an infected surface or object and then their eyes mouth or nose.

The virus can survive on surfaces (door handles, changing tables, toys, clothes etc) for up to 8 hours!

Symptoms

- Common cold symptoms (sneezing, runny nose, fever)
- Thick mucus
- Difficult wheezing breathing
- Long coughing spells which can end in vomiting
- Weakness, tiredness, less strength to eat, drink and cough
- In young infants, irritability and breathing difficulties may be the only symptom

Symptoms usually peak on the fifth day but the cough can last for several weeks.

Advice

- Keep your child at home and away from other children or elderly adults.

- The child should sleep in a cool room, with their head raised.
- You can give your child saline drops in the nose (available from the pharmacy). These will loosen the thick mucus, which makes breathing through the nose difficult.
- Encourage drinking and oral fluids – this can help make the mucus easier to cough up.
- ALWAYS WASH YOUR HANDS BEFORE AND AFTER CONTACT WITH YOUR CHILD
- Avoid contact with infants (0-6 months) so you do not infect them.
- Do not dress the child too warmly if they have a fever.
- Do not smoke anywhere near your child.
- Try to get your child to change sleeping position, sleep on both sides, sit up, move around and play as much as possible. This will help loosen any mucus and makes coughing easier.
- Limit visitors. The lower the number of visitors the less likely the spread of the virus.
- Manage temperatures and any pain with Paracetamol and/or Ibuprofen as directed (from the pharmacy)

RSV does not necessarily warrant hospitalisation and in most cases recovery will be within 1-2 weeks.

Contact a Doctor if the child:

- Has rapid or difficult breathing
- Has long coughing spells **and** becomes pale or blue in the face
- Becomes too tired or weak to drink
- Is unusually quiet
- Worries you and you feel insecure.

You child can return to day care when they no longer have a fever and can play without breathing difficulties. If possible keep the child at home for two extra days to allow full recovery.

SHG
17 February 2015