



**NL Health
Services**

Infection Prevention and
Control

FACT SHEET

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

**HAND HYGIENE:
THE BEST
WAY TO PREVENT
INFECTION**

What is Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)?

RSV is a very common virus seen in infants and young children. Most children have had RSV by age 3 years. Unfortunately, being infected once does not protect the infant or child from becoming infected again. RSV can cause symptoms similar to a cold; however, some infants and children may develop pneumonia or bronchiolitis. In Newfoundland and Labrador, RSV season tends to occur between January and May each year.

What are the symptoms of RSV?

The symptoms of RSV are similar to that of a cold and may include:

- Fever
- Runny nose
- Irritability
- Decreased activity
- Decreased appetite

These symptoms may get worse and may include:

- Persistent cough
- Wheezing (whistling sound)
- Rapid and/or difficulty breathing

Who is at risk of severe illness from RSV?

- Infants born before 32 weeks.
- Infants with chronic illness, especially lung and heart disease.
- Infants living in remote areas who are less than 36 weeks or less than 6 months of age at the start of the RSV season.
- Children and adults with weakened immune systems.
- The elderly and those living in congregate living facilities.

How is RSV spread?

- RSV is easily spread by coughing and sneezing.
- RSV can live for 30 minutes or more on unwashed hands and several hours on surfaces.
- Adults infected with RSV can pass the virus on to infants or children.

How do I prevent RSV?

- Hand hygiene is the most effective way to prevent infection.
- Clean hands before and after touching the infant/child.
- Keep individuals with cold symptoms away from the infant/child.
- Keep infants away from crowded places during RSV season (i.e., shopping malls).
- Do not smoke around infants/children.
- Breastfeeding is recommended to support your infant's immune system.
- Encourage children to wash their hands regularly, especially after returning from school/daycare/play/group activities.
- Do not share personal items such as pacifiers, eating utensils, toothbrushes, etc.