

RSV (Respiratory syncytial virus)



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Neenah Joint School District Health & Wellness Center

Mon. 7 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Tues. 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Wed. 7 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Thurs. 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Fri. 7 a.m. to 1 p.m.

In the past month, we've seen a rise in the total number of cold and flu type illnesses. In particular, RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) has sickened an alarming number of children. As with most viruses, people of any age can be infected, but the severity of illness will vary by age and underlying health status. RSV tends to cause more dramatic symptoms in infants and young children, and is one of the most common causes of outpatient medical visits in this demographic. Adults and teenagers can get RSV as well, but our symptoms tend to be mild as we have some immunity related to prior infection. Older adults can become quite ill with RSV, usually because of a weakened immune system that often comes with aging.

Symptoms of RSV will typically be similar to the common cold (runny nose, cough, fever in the first day or so of illness), but for babies and young children may be more severe and may include fussiness, poor appetite, poor sleep, and difficulty breathing. If these symptoms are present, evaluation by a medical provider is needed. Some of these babies will need emergency care or even hospitalization.

A baby or small child with cold symptoms that do not include uncontrolled fever or difficulty breathing can usually be monitored at home, but would need medical evaluation if their condition worsens or does not improve in a day or so.

While adults do not tend to have severe symptoms with RSV, they can still spread the virus to vulnerable babies or small children. In addition, having an older sibling in daycare or school is considered a risk factor for RSV in babies and small children. The older sibling (with partial immunity to RSV) may have mild symptoms of cough and runny nose, but can transmit the virus to their younger sibling. When an older sibling broadens their social circle, parents should be aware that the younger siblings at home may see an increase in their frequency of illness. Providing recommended vaccinations, practicing good hand washing, and staying home when sick are the best measures to prevent unwanted illness.

There is no vaccine for RSV, although there is a potential candidate in the works. At this time, people who have been exposed to RSV in the past likely have the type of immunity that prevents severe illness, but can still become ill with mild symptoms. Thankfully, there is only one strain of RSV, so it is uncommon to have a severe illness with RSV more than once in a child's life.