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INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

RSV 101: Common virus can cause problems for some young infants

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) causes an illness similar to the common cold, and affects most young children by the time they turn 2. But RSV can cause more than a cold for a small number of infants.

This virus is common for about four to five months during the late fall through early spring. Children usually experience a runny nose, cough and low fever. If your baby's symptoms become more severe, contact your pediatrician. Fast breathing, wheezing, coughing, crackling sounds from their lungs, and flaring of the nose could suggest a more serious problem, because the infection has spread into the lungs to cause pneumonia or closed up the airways (bronchiolitis). Most infants get better on their own, but about 3% must be admitted to the hospital for a few days.

Some children have an increased risk of hospitalization because of RSV infection and this includes babies who were born very prematurely (before 29 weeks of pregnancy), children who were in the neonatal intensive care unit receiving extra oxygen for at least 28 days and children born with certain types of severe congenital heart disease.

No RSV vaccine is available at the present time. Your pediatrician can help decide if your infant meets American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) guidelines on the use of a preventive medication that requires a prescription (palivizumab; brand name: Synagis).

The AAP advises parents to take steps to help prevent their young babies from catching a common virus:

- Keep babies away from anyone who has a cold, fever or other illness.
- Avoid bringing infants to crowded areas or near tobacco smoke.
- Ask people to wash their hands before touching or holding your baby.
- Keep infants who are at high risk of problems from all viral infections out of child care during respiratory virus season, when possible.

The AAP recommends that everyone who is 6 months of age and older get an influenza vaccine every year. Protecting yourself can help prevent illness from spreading to people at high risk of problems during cold and flu season.

Want to know more about RSV? Visit the AAP Healthy Children website for parents, <http://bit.ly/1IKasYy>.

— Trisha Koriath



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