NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL℠

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RSV INFECTION
(Respiratory Syncytial Virus)

RSV stands for "respiratory syncytial virus. It is most common from fall to spring, but a person can catch it any time of the year. Almost all babies get RSV sometime – most of them before they are 2 years old. For healthy babies it is like getting a cold. But RSV can be very serious. It can cause pneumonia, a serious lung disease, or even death. Each year thousands of babies must stay in the hospital because of RSV.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

These signs of RSV may seem like just a cold:

- Sneezing
- Stuffy or runny nose
- Sore throat
- Fever

RSV can get serious very quickly. **Call your child's doctor** if your baby:

- Has a cold and is less than 6 months of age
- Has any breathing problems (wheezing or coughing, fast breathing, blue or gray skin color)
- Has a cold and is at high risk for RSV (See page 2)
- Seems very sick or has trouble eating, drinking, or sleeping.

Picture 1 The doctor will examine your baby and may order some tests.

DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

The doctor will examine your baby and may order a chest X-ray or other tests. Your baby will probably feel better in a few days. RSV goes away on its own, but it may take a week or two for your baby to get completely well. RSV can come back, so if your baby seems to be better, and then shows signs of severe RSV again, call your baby's doctor.

PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF RSV

Adults can get RSV, too. If you have a cold, be careful around your baby. Here are some tips to keep RSV from spreading:

- Sneeze or cough into a tissue and away from infants and children. Keep people who have colds away from your baby. This includes brothers and sisters.
- Wash your hands often – before touching your baby and before handling food. Wash your hands after sneezing or coughing, touching pets, or changing diapers, and ask others to do the same.
- Wash your baby's toys and clothes often.
- Do not share pacifiers, towels, washcloths, toothbrushes, drinking glasses, cups, forks, or spoons.
- Don't smoke around your baby. Don't let others smoke either.

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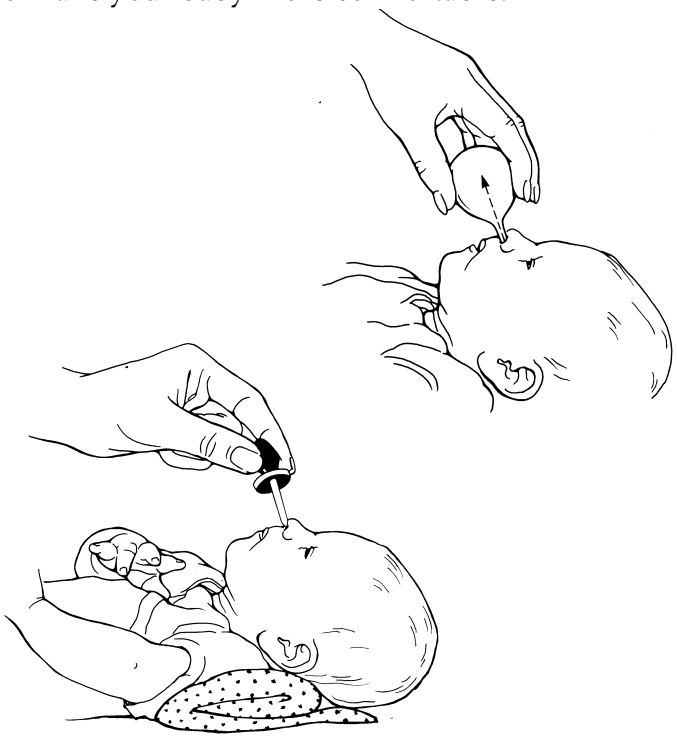
HOME TREATMENT

Antibiotic medicines (such as penicillin) are not used because they do not kill the virus that causes RSV infection. But there are some things you can do to make your baby more comfortable:

- Use a cool mist vaporizer. The moist air may make breathing easier and reduce coughing.
- For children older than 6 months, give plenty of liquids like water and fruit juice.
- Children younger than 6 months should not have fruit juice or water. Instead breast-feed or bottle-feed small amounts more often.
- To loosen a "stuffy nose," you can use salt water (saline) nose drops or a bulb syringe. (Refer to the Helping Hand, *Suctioning Nose with a Bulb Syringe*, HH-II-24, *and Saline (Salt Water) Preparation*, HH-II-50.) Tell your doctor if the discharge from the nose turns yellow, green, or gray.
- Give acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin) for fever. **Do not give aspirin.** Aspirin use in children with viral illness has been linked to Reye's syndrome, a very serious disease.



Picture 2 Saline nose drops and suctioning may help make your baby more comfortable.

WHEN TO CALL THE DOCTOR

Call your child's doctor if any of these things occur:

- Fever over 101°F axillary (under the arm)
- Cough that lasts more than 4 days
- Thick mucus from the nose or mouth that is yellow, green, or gray
- Chest pain or trouble breathing
- Blue or gray color of lips, skin, or fingernails
- Baby seems "lazy" and doesn't act like his normal self.

THINGS TO ASK YOUR BABY'S DOCTOR

Ask your child's doctor:

- If your baby is at high risk for RSV disease. RSV can be serious for babies who were born early or have lung problems.
- If your baby needs medicine to help prevent RSV disease from coming back.
- If you should keep your child home from school or child care.

If you have any questions, be sure to ask your doctor or nurse.