



## A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

### *RSV for Young and Old*

*Respiratory Syncytial Virus Activity — United States, July 2008–December 2009*

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*[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.*

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, is one of most common causes of bronchiolitis and pneumonia in infants and the elderly. Each year, up to 150,000 children under one and 177,000 adults over 65 are hospitalized with RSV.

Gissela Villarruel is an epidemiologist with CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, and she's joining us today to discuss ways to prevent RSV. Welcome to the show, Gissela.

[Ms. Villarruel] Thank you for having me.

[Dr. Gaynes] Gissela, is RSV more common during any particular time of the year?

[Ms. Villarruel] The RSV season may vary, depending where you live, but in United States RSV infection usually occurs from November to April.

[Dr. Gaynes] How is RSV transmitted?

[Ms. Villarruel] RSV is very contagious and can spread directly when an infected person coughs or sneezes into the air. These droplets are then inhaled or can come in contact with our eyes, our nose, or our mouth. Indirect contact can occur if the virus gets on surfaces, such as doorknobs or toys, telephones or counter tops. We then touch these surfaces and rub our eyes to become infected ourselves.

[Dr. Gaynes] Gissela, what are the symptoms of RSV?

[Ms. Villarruel] Symptoms of RSV are similar to other respiratory infections. A person with an RSV infection might cough, sneeze, have a runny nose, fever, and decrease in appetite. Wheezing and difficulty breathing may also occur. In very young infants, it may also cause irritability, decreased activity, difficulty breathing. But in people of all ages, especially infants and young children, RSV can develop into a serious disease, like pneumonia or bronchiolitis, which is an inflammation of the small airways.

[Dr. Gaynes] How often does the disease progress to the point of say, requiring hospitalization?

[Ms. Villarruel] Well, most healthy infants infected with RSV do not need to be hospitalized. Your doctor can give advice if hospitalization is needed. Generally, if a person is having difficulty breathing or drinking enough fluids, then they may need to be hospitalized, but recovery from this illness usually occurs in about one to two weeks, even in those hospitalized

[Dr. Gaynes] How is the disease treated?

[Ms. Villarruel] There is no specific treatment for RSV infection, but your doctor can give advice on how to make people with an RSV infection more comfortable.

[Dr. Gaynes] Gisella, what are some strategies for preventing RSV?

[Ms. Villarruel] Since RSV can spread rapidly, there are steps that can be taken to prevent the spread of RSV and other germs that cause cold-like symptoms, such as always covering coughs and sneezes, washing your hands frequently and correctly with soap and water for 15 to 20 seconds, cleaning contaminated surfaces with disinfectants, and avoid sharing cups and eating utensils, refrain from kissing others when you have these symptoms. Unfortunately, there is no vaccine for RSV. There is a drug, palivizumab, that has to be given as an injection, available to prevent severe RSV illness in certain infants and children who are at high risk. The drug can help prevent the development of serious RSV disease, but it cannot cure or treat or prevent RSV infection, and only a doctor can give it and tell parents if their child could benefit from it.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about RSV?

[Ms. Villarruel] They can go to [www.cdc.gov/RSV](http://www.cdc.gov/RSV).

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Gisella. I've been talking today with CDC's Gisella Villarruel about ways to prevent RSV.

Remember, RSV is a virus that commonly causes respiratory illness in infants and the elderly. You can prevent the spread of RSV by washing your hands and covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.