

RSV Information for Early Childhood Education Centres

A common winter virus called RSV is currently circulating in New Zealand. RSV affects all age groups but is especially severe for babies, pēpi and infants less than one year old.

It is very infectious and can easily pass from person to person through coughing and sneezing.

Signs and symptoms to look out for

RSV symptoms include:

- a runny nose;
- decrease in appetite;
- coughing;
- sneezing;
- fever (often mild);
- wheezing or other signs they are having difficulty breathing.

It can cause more serious illness in some cases such as bronchiolitis (narrowing of airways in infants) and pneumonia – often needing hospital level care.

Advice for ECE staff

Look out for the symptoms listed and pass advice onto parents as needed. Especially emphasise the importance of keeping sick children at home and using simple hygiene measures (such as washing hands or using an alcohol-based sanitiser frequently and covering coughs and sneezes).

Use masks or other PPE such as gloves when appropriate and practical in the centre environment – to reduce the risk of picking something up or passing it on.

Wipe down door handles and other frequently-touched surfaces with disinfectant or other sanitising product.

If you have been unwell: Do not return to childcare, school or work until you have been symptom-free for 48 hours.

Early medical advice is especially important for people with underlying medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, cancer, heart and lung disease and some autoimmune diseases, or for severely overweight people and pregnant women.

Advice for parents and whānau

Look out for symptoms and contact your GP or healthcare provider if you are concerned. Call Healthline (0800 611 116) free after hours for advice on what to do and where to go.

Keep your child at home if they are unwell. Also please stay away from childcare centres such as pre-schools and kindergartens if you are sick yourself.

Please don't visit any hospital if you are sick and especially don't bring sick children to visit. Only well parents or caregivers can visit babies in hospital currently. Fewer people visiting reduces the risk of exposing babies to RSV.

When to seek urgent health advice

Parents and caregivers should seek urgent medical advice if a child has symptoms and:

- is under three months old;
- is breathing fast or noisily or using extra effort to breathe;
- looks pale and unwell;
- is taking less than half their normal feeds;
- is vomiting; or
- has not had a wet nappy for more than six hours.

Parents and caregivers should call 111 for an ambulance if a child:

- has blue lips and tongue;
- has severe difficulty breathing;
- is becoming very sleepy and not easy to wake up;

Simple things to help stop the spread of RSV and other winter illnesses

- Keep children home if they're sick and stay home yourself if you're not well.
- Wash your hands often with soap or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow.
- Clean surfaces regularly.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Wear a mask or face covering on public transport or when you cannot physically distance from strangers.

[Find out more about RSV on the Ministry of Health website.](#)