

# Protecting Your Child from RSV

FOR PARENTS AND EXPECTANT PARENTS

## What is RSV?

**Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) causes an illness that affects the airway and lungs, especially in babies and young children.**

RSV often leads to cold-like symptoms and is the most common cause of a chest infection called bronchiolitis. Babies and young children often have mild illness from RSV and recover quickly. However, some may develop a severe infection that leads to hospitalization and can be life-threatening.

Almost all children get RSV by age two, and it is the main reason children in this age group are hospitalized.

RSV spreads easily and is most active from late fall to early spring. You and your child can get RSV by having direct contact with a person or surface infected with RSV. You can also get it by being around someone infected by RSV who is coughing or sneezing.



## What are the symptoms of RSV?

Symptoms of RSV are similar to those of a cold or flu. They include:



Cough



Runny Nose



Fever



Drinking or  
Eating Less



Low Energy or  
Being Very Tired



Wheezing



Fussiness or  
Irritability



Seek medical attention if your child is having trouble breathing, is dehydrated, and/or their symptoms are getting worse.

## What can I do to protect my child against RSV?

There are ways to keep your child from getting an RSV infection. These include:



A preventive antibody medication that is given to a child



A vaccine that is given to a pregnant person

Both of these options are safe and effective. Only one of them is needed to help protect a child from RSV. Using both the medication and the vaccine is not needed unless recommended by a healthcare provider.

**Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommends the preventive antibody medication to be given to a child as the preferred form of protection against RSV infection over the vaccine being given to a pregnant person.** This recommendation is based on how well the preventive antibody medication works, how long it provides protection and how safe it is.

**Beyfortus™ (also known by the name of nirsevimab) is the preventive antibody medication that is recommended.**

It is not a vaccine. Beyfortus works by acting like the antibodies that are made by our bodies. These antibodies help get rid of germs and harmful substances.



## Is my child eligible to receive Beyfortus?

Your child can get Beyfortus during the RSV season in Ontario if they are:

- ✓ Born April 1 or after **and** less than eight months of age up to the end of the RSV season
- ✓ Under two years old and at risk from severe RSV illness during their second RSV season\*

RSV season usually runs from November to the end of March, but the exact timing can change every year and may depend on where you live in Ontario.

\*This includes, but is not limited to, children with chronic lung disease of prematurity (bronchopulmonary dysplasia), congenital heart disease, severe immunodeficiency, Down syndrome, cystic fibrosis, neuromuscular disease, congenital airway anomalies.



## Is Beyfortus safe?

Yes. Clinical trials have shown that **Beyfortus is safe for babies and young children**. Beyfortus has been shown to prevent RSV-related illnesses such as bronchiolitis and to prevent severe RSV infections.

Side effects after getting Beyfortus are usually mild and last only a few days. These may include redness, swelling and pain at the injection site, rash and/or fever.

Beyfortus may safely be given at the same time as other immunizations.

Getting Beyfortus will not give a child RSV. Although rare, it is possible for a child to get severely ill from RSV even if they have received Beyfortus.



## How is Beyfortus given to my child?

Beyfortus is given as a one-time injection (often in the thigh muscle). The treatment provides immunity against RSV as soon as it is received and works best within the first **five months** after it is given.



## When can my child get Beyfortus?

- ✓ If your baby is born during the RSV season, Beyfortus should be given soon after birth. This will provide protection during the early months when your baby is most vulnerable.
- ✓ If your baby is born before the RSV season and is eight months old or younger, Beyfortus should be given shortly before the RSV season begins.
- ✓ If your baby remains at high risk from RSV infection and is entering their second RSV season, Beyfortus should be given shortly before the RSV season begins.

If your child misses these times, they can still get Beyfortus at any point during the RSV season.



## Where can my child get Beyfortus?

Newborns should get Beyfortus in hospital before going home after birth. If not, it can also be given by your midwife, primary care provider or through your local public health unit. For young children that are eligible, Beyfortus may be given at their paediatrician or primary care provider's office, as well as through outpatient hospital clinics.

## Abrysvo™ (also known by the name of RSVpreF) is a vaccine that can be given to a pregnant person to prevent RSV infection in their baby.

- ✓ It is given between **32 and 36 weeks of pregnancy** if your baby is due during or near the start of the RSV season.
- ✓ The vaccine helps the pregnant person's immune system make antibodies that can be passed to the baby during pregnancy. These antibodies will **protect the baby from RSV infection for the first few months of life, usually up to six months**.



Speak with your healthcare provider or local public health unit for more information.

## What else can I do to protect against RSV?



Stay home when sick and avoid close contact with sick people



Wash your hands often



Clean and disinfect surfaces regularly



Cough or sneeze into your arm



Feed your baby breast/chest milk (contains protective antibodies)



Avoid exposure to smoking

*This fact sheet is for general information only and does not replace medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Talk to your healthcare provider to discuss your options and decide on a plan that works for you and your family to help protect your child during the RSV season.*

For more information, visit the **Ontario Ministry of Health's RSV website:** [Ontario.ca/RSV](https://Ontario.ca/RSV)

This fact sheet is available in other languages. Scan the QR code to see them.

