



RSV: What Parents of Premies Should Know

(NAPSA)—With premature births at a record high, more babies are facing serious health challenges during their first year of life. These problems may include respiratory infections that can compromise infants' lung function, making them more immediately susceptible to serious respiratory problems.

According to a new survey conducted by the National Perinatal Association, nearly one-half of parents of premature infants are not aware of the preventive measures they can take to help protect their babies from respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), a common respiratory ailment that can lead to serious illness in preemies. In addition, almost 58 percent of parents whose babies have been hospitalized with RSV said they did not know about medication that could have helped prevent their child's hospitalization.

RSV is a virus that causes infection of the lungs and breathing passages. In most infants, RSV causes only minor symptoms that resemble those of the common cold. But in premature babies, RSV can lead to lower-respiratory-tract infections, such as pneumonia, which can be serious and sometimes life-threatening. In most parts of the country, RSV season lasts from November through April.

RSV often starts with a runny nose, coughing and low-grade fever, but as the infection progresses, it may cause breathing problems or wheezing, irritability or restlessness and poor appetite.

Reducing the risk

Preventing infection is the best way to protect preemies and high-risk babies, such as those with congenital heart or lung disease or a compromised immune system, from the potentially dangerous effects of RSV and other respiratory illnesses.

To reduce the risk of severe RSV infection, parents can decrease their babies' exposure to respiratory viruses by:

- Always washing their hands before holding their child, and insisting that others do, too;
- Washing babies' toys, clothes, play areas and bedding often;
- Not sharing personal items (pacifiers, cups, forks, spoons, towels, washcloths);
- Keeping babies away from anyone with a cold or the flu, and avoiding crowded areas and day care during RSV season; and
- Never letting anyone smoke around the baby.

A pediatrician can provide medicine that may help protect babies against severe RSV infection. Many high-risk infants are first treated with such preventive medicine in the neonatal intensive care unit and then get additional monthly doses throughout the RSV season as coordinated by their primary care physician or pediatrician.

The NPA survey results represent a national sample of 500 parents of premature children age 5 years or younger. The survey was underwritten by MedImmune, Inc. To learn more about RSV, visit www.rsvprotection.com.