

# Children's Health

## When Is A Cold Not A Cold?



(NAPSA)—It's not uncommon for parents to overreact to their newborn's every snuffle and cough. But just because every child gets colds, it doesn't mean it's safe to simply dismiss such symptoms as "just a cold," especially if the child was born prematurely.

Every 60 seconds, a premature baby, or "preemie," is born in the United States. These little bundles of joy have their own special care needs, including the need for protection against a common viral infection known as respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), the number one viral killer of children under 5 years of age. The following questions and answers can help parents understand the potential risks of RSV infection for their premature infants:

### **Q. What is RSV?**

A. RSV is a virus that causes infection of the lungs and breathing passages. RSV infects approximately two-thirds of all infants during the first year of life and 90 percent of all children by age 2.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, the infants at highest risk of developing RSV disease are those born prematurely (at a gestational age of less than 36 weeks) and those with chronic lung or heart disease or a compromised immune system. Preemies are at higher risk for RSV infection because their lungs are underdeveloped and they don't have enough antibodies to fight off infections.

### **Q. How can I protect my child from RSV?**

A. By decreasing exposure to

the virus and taking timely medical action, you can help protect your preemie against RSV. Recommended steps include: proper hand-washing; regular washing of your baby's toys, clothes, play areas and bedding; avoiding crowds during virus season; avoiding environmental air pollutants; and asking your pediatrician about RSV prevention medication.

### **Q. How can I recognize RSV and what should I do?**

A. Call your pediatrician right away if your infant: develops a cold; has fast breathing or breathing problems, wheezing, worsening cough, or blue appearance around the mouth or fingernails; or develops a fever of more than 100.4° F in the first three months, more than 101° F between 3 and 6 months, or more than 103° F after 6 months. If your baby has an RSV infection, make sure he or she gets plenty of rest and drinks lots of clear fluids.

### **Q. Are there long-term consequences after RSV infection?**

A. RSV infection in infancy can affect a child's health as he grows because of an increased risk of recurrent wheezing until early adolescence. The precise relationship between RSV infection in infancy and increased risk for various respiratory problems, including asthma, later in childhood is an area of ongoing study.

To learn more about RSV, its symptoms and potential consequences, speak with your child's pediatrician or visit [www.RSVprotection.com](http://www.RSVprotection.com).