

Protecting Premature Babies

(NAPSA)—There are ways parents can help keep their premature baby safe and healthy. That's good news, considering that a premature baby is born once every 60 seconds in America and that one out of every eight babies born in the country is premature.

Premature babies are particularly susceptible to lower respiratory diseases because of their underdeveloped lungs. In fact, one of the most common diseases affecting preemies is respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). The condition is highly contagious and potentially serious if not treated correctly.

According to PremieCare, an organization that educates the public about premature babies, initial RSV symptoms are similar to those caused by cold—but an infected baby can get very sick, very quickly. Infected babies develop symptoms such as difficulty breathing, difficulty eating, wheezing, rapid breathing, and a blue color around the lips. Doctors say parents of at-risk children need to act fast by calling their pediatrician or health care provider immediately if signs of RSV complications appear.

Steve Berman, M.D., FAAP, former President of the American Academy of Pediatrics, says learning about RSV can help parents protect their children from it. He recommends using the acronym CARES as a guideline for keeping kids safe:

- Clean hands before touching the baby.
- Ask friends and relatives not



Parents can protect premature babies from respiratory disease.

to visit if they have a cold, fever or sore throat.

- Respiratory diseases, including RSV, have symptoms. Learn them.
- Educate yourself, your family and friends about what to expect when raising a premature baby.
- Secondhand smoke is bad for all children. Keep it away from your baby.

Parents can also ask primary care givers about a medication that can help protect premature children and those with congenital heart disease from severe RSV disease. The drug, called Synagis® (palivizumab), can be administered in a health care provider's office once a month during the RSV season. It's been used safely in thousands of babies worldwide.

For more information about RSV, visit the PremieCare Web site at www.MOSTonline.org or visit www.rsvprotection.com. For information about Synagis, visit www.medimmune.com.

Synagis is a humanized monoclonal antibody licensed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1998. Synagis is given through a simple intramuscular injection. Synagis has been used safely in thousands of babies. Adverse events with Synagis may include upper respiratory tract infection, ear infection, fever, and runny nose. Very rare cases of severe allergic reactions such as anaphylaxis (<1 case per 100,000 patients) and hypersensitivity reactions have been reported. Synagis should not be used in patients with a history of a severe prior reaction to Synagis or its components.