



Children's Health

As Premature Birth Rate Soars, So Does RSV Risk

(NAPSA)—Learning more about a common, highly contagious and potentially serious virus may help parents protect their babies—especially in the increasingly likely event that their babies are premature.

The annual rate of premature births soared more than 27 percent between 1981 and 2001, with prematurity now affecting one out of every eight babies. One of the many health problems premature children face is an elevated risk for contracting RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus) disease.

RSV is the most common cause of lower respiratory tract infection in children under five years of age and the number one reason for hospitalization of children under the age of one. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), each year up to 125,000 children are hospitalized with serious RSV disease.

“We are seeing an increase in premature births and this will likely result in a rise in the number of cases of serious RSV disease,” said Dr. William Sears, pediatrician and author.

Because premature birth interrupts the final stages of normal lung development, each premature infant is at risk for contracting serious RSV disease.

“There are simple things families and caregivers can do to help keep children healthy, like wash their hands every time they come in contact with the baby, avoid visiting crowded places, limit exposure to people with colds or fevers, avoid secondhand smoke, and talk to their doctor,” said Sears. “It is important that parents of premature babies discuss these steps with their doctors.”

According to PreemieCare, an organization which educates the public about premature babies, RSV symptoms may initially be similar to a cold and include:



The best tool for preventing RSV is education. Parents can talk to their pediatricians about what to do.

fever, runny nose, and coughing. An infected baby can get very sick very quickly with difficulty breathing, difficulty eating, wheezing (a whistling sound), and a blue color around the lips. Since RSV complications can strike rapidly, parents of at-risk children need to act fast by calling their baby's doctor immediately if complications appear.

There is a medication, Synagis® (palivizumab), indicated for the prevention of serious lower respiratory tract disease caused by respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) in pediatric patients at high risk of RSV disease. Synagis has been used safely in hundreds 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. For more information about RSV, call 1-877-848-8512, visit the PreemieCare Web site at www.MOSTonline.org, or visit www.rsvprotection.com.