

Media release

20 July 2021

RSV and other winter viruses: public health advice and hospital visitor restrictions

Wairarapa, like much of New Zealand, is experiencing an increase in seasonal illness. Many people are sick and our hospital is admitting lots of people requiring care.

We are seeing a lot of respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), which is a very infectious illness.

In the past two weeks, the hospital has been full (more than 90% occupancy) every day. Many of our patients admitted are sick with the virus. It typically affects the very young and the old and frail – but anyone of any age can get sick, and it can be very serious.

RSV affects all age groups.

The virus can easily pass from person to person through coughing and sneezing. For healthy older children and adults, RSV usually causes a worse-than-average cold, but it is especially severe for

- infants and very young children
- older people
- people who have pre-existing medical conditions and reduced immunity

For these people RSV can be very serious, so they must be especially careful. However anyone can get RSV and some will suffer badly, even older children and adults that are usually quite well.

People infected with RSV are usually contagious for five to eight days and it is really important that anyone, of any age, does not mix with other people while they have symptoms.

In our hospital

We are currently restricting visitor access and making changes to help protect our vulnerable patients.

- No one with flu symptoms may visit - wait until you have been symptom-free for 48 hours before visiting
- no babies and children should visit

- Please limit all other visitors as much as possible
- Labouring women can have their partner/support person with them
- Masks are compulsory in ED and no extra visitors to accompany patients in ED
- Anyone coming to ED with flu symptoms must tell reception

RSV symptoms and what to do if you have them

RSV symptoms include a runny nose, decrease in appetite, coughing, sneezing, fever (often mild), and difficulty breathing or changes in breathing. In some cases, it can cause more serious illness such as bronchiolitis (narrowing of airways in infants) and pneumonia.

If you have these symptoms, you should contact your medical centre or call Healthline (0800 611 116) for advice. Get advice early, especially for very young and elderly people, and those with underlying medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, cancer, heart and lung disease and some autoimmune diseases.

Do not mix with other people. If you are sick you must not return to childcare, school or work, or socialise with others until your symptoms have resolved.

Seek urgent advice for your baby or child if they are:

- under three months old
- breathing fast, noisily or using extra effort to breathe
- looking pale and unwell
- taking less than half their normal feeds
- vomiting
- or have not had a wet nappy for more than six hours

Call 111 for an ambulance if your child:

- has blue lips and tongue
- has severe difficulty breathing, or pauses during breathing
- is becoming very sleepy and not easy to wake up
- is very pale
- is floppy

How to prevent the spread of RSV and other viruses

- Stay home if you are unwell and do not mix with other people

- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue
- Regularly wash hands with soap and water for at least twenty seconds and dry them thoroughly
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser if hand washing facilities are not available
- Avoid close contact with sick people, this is especially important for people with underlying medical conditions who are at increased risk of complications
- If correctly worn, masks are valuable to prevent spread

ENDS

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