

Common virus can lead to life-threatening conditions in children

March 19 2012

(Medical Xpress) -- Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) is a common virus that infects the lungs and breathing passage ways. Though it may only produce minor cold symptoms in adults, it can lead to serious illness in young children and those with compromised immune systems.

“This is an extremely contagious virus, so it can easily be spread from one [child](#) to another in a school or home setting. We continue to see a large number of kids being admitted to the hospital this year due to RSV. Though it often peaks in winter, the virus may continue to affect communities through early spring,” said Rahul Bhatia, MD, pediatric intensive care unit physician at Loyola University Health System and assistant professor of pediatrics at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, RSV is the leading cause of bronchiolitis, an inflammation of the small airways in the [lung](#), in infants under the age of 1. Most children will have been exposed to RSV by their second birthday.

“Though younger children have a greater chance of being hospitalized due to the virus, any age group can be affected,” Bhatia said.

Unfortunately, there is no vaccine to protect [children](#) against this [virus](#). In fact, the best way to prevent the spread is good, old-fashioned hand washing.

“RSV is easily spread by touching infected people and surfaces, so washing your child’s and your own hands often is the best way to prevent it from being spread,” Bhatia said.

According to Bhatia, symptoms typically peak around 5-7 days into the illness and can continue to provide problems for 10-15 days. People with RSV are usually contagious for 3-8 days, but those with a weakened [immune system](#) can be contagious for up to 4 weeks.

“If your school-age child has [cold symptoms](#), it may be best to try to keep them away from younger brothers or sisters to avoid transmission,” Bhatia said.

RSV symptoms vary with age and can be similar to that of a cold. Bhatia suggests calling your doctor if your child has the following symptoms:

- It has become increasingly more difficult for your child to breathe
- Your child has nasal flaring
- A decreased appetite
- Your child has decreased urine output

Bhatia suggests going to the emergency room if your child:

- Quits breathing
- Is a dusky color
- Is having problems breathing

“There are numerous viruses that can cause respiratory infections. The only way to know if it is RSV is to have testing done,” Bhatia said. “RSV has been around for a while. It’s nothing new, just every once in a while we see a spike in cases and this happens to be one of those years.”

Provided by Loyola University Health System

Citation: Common virus can lead to life-threatening conditions in children (2012, March 19)
retrieved 6 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-03-common-virus-life-threatening-conditions-children.html>

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