

Doctors alarmed as surge in RSV cases fills German hospitals

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Intensive care doctors in Germany warned Thursday that hospital pediatric units in the country are stretched to breaking point in part due to rising cases of respiratory infections among infants.

The intensive care association DIVI said the seasonal surge in respiratory syncytial virus cases and a shortage of nurses was causing a "catastrophic situation" in hospitals.

RSV is a common, highly contagious virus that infects nearly all babies and toddlers by age 2, some of whom can fall seriously ill. Experts say the easing of coronavirus pandemic restrictions means RSV is [currently affecting a larger number of babies and children](#), whose immune systems aren't primed to fend it off.

Hospital doctors are having to make [difficult decisions](#) about which children to assign to limited intensive care beds. In some cases, children with RSV or other serious conditions are getting transferred to hospitals elsewhere in Germany with spare capacity.

DIVI said a recent survey showed fewer than 100 free pediatric beds nationwide and that the situation could worsen.

"If the forecasts are right, then things will get significantly more acute in the coming days and week," Sebastian Brenner, head of the pediatric intensive care unit at University Hospital Dresden, told German news channel n-tv. "We see this in France, for example, and in Switzerland. If that happens, then there will be bottlenecks when it comes to treatment."

Others warned that, in certain cases, doctors already were unable to provide the urgent care some children need.

"The situation is so precarious that we genuinely have to say children are dying because we can't treat them anymore," Dr. Michael Sasse, head of pediatric intensive care at Hannover's MHH University Hospital, said.

German Health Minister Karl Lauterbach announced Thursday that the government was easing some regulations to make it easier to transfer

nurses to pediatric units and providing an additional 600 million euros (\$630 million) to pediatric hospitals over the coming two years.

The European Union's executive commission last month authorized the world's first one-dose drug against RSV.

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