



The Third Part of an Infectious Trifecta: RSV

It's often heard on the news about the dangers and spreading of influenza and COVID-19, but there might be a third virus that you have heard quite a bit less about. That would be RSV, which stands for respiratory syncytial virus. For many of us, this is an illness we haven't heard of prior to the past few months, but its prevalence is especially notable during these cold fall and winter seasons.

RSV is a common respiratory virus that typically causes mild, cold-like symptoms. As it is a respiratory virus, it focuses its attack on the lungs. This causes inflammation of small airways in the lungs. RSV can cause direct viral pneumonia, or the inflammation of the airways could lead to further infection. It's important to note that RSV is both infectious as well as inflammatory, and both can happen at the same time. So, while RSV is quite mild for a large amount of folks, there are certain populations in which it could prove to be quite damaging or deadly.

In terms of populations that are hit hard by RSV, one of them is infants younger than a year old. For these babies, it's important to monitor their health very carefully and consistently. Infants who get an RSV infection nearly always show symptoms, which isn't the same case for adults who catch RSV. For an adult, common symptoms include a runny nose, decrease in appetite, coughing, sneezing, and fever. However, in the population of young infants, sometimes the only visible symptoms might be irritability, decreased activity, and breathing issues/apnea.

There's another population of humans that are notably susceptible to RSV; this would be the category of adults 65 years of age and older. Typically, they become a bit more susceptible due to natural factors like weakened immune systems and chronic disease (especially heart and lung disease). RSV especially becomes dangerous when certain heart and respiratory conditions are already an issue someone is going through; namely, asthma, COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), and congestive heart failure. With these individuals, it's important to note that RSV itself might not result in serious illness or death, but the coexisting diseases and illnesses that worsen from the presence of RSV may be their ultimate undoing. RSV worsens these conditions to a point where they become a much more fearful illness than RSV itself.

Regarding protecting yourself and others from RSV, most of the same rules and regulations that we're used to from the past few years of COVID prevalence apply. Wash your hands thoroughly and regularly with soap, don't touch your face, avoid close contact with sick people, cover your coughs and sneezes, stay home when you feel unwell, and keep surfaces that are frequently touched as clean as possible. If you suspect that you might have RSV, it's important to get tested as soon as possible. If your RSV test ends up negative, it's still very possible that you could be positive for COVID-19 or influenza. Getting tested for all three, if you can, is a great way to keep track of your health. Unlike COVID testing, RSV testing is not something that can be done with a take-home test that you purchase from your local drug store, so you'll need to go out to a medical or health facility to take one and receive a proper diagnosis. With this hazardous trifecta of viruses out in the world, it's vital that we keep up our good habits in regard to cleansing, social distancing, and health visits.