

# More than a common cold:

## The price of RSV for families and healthcare systems

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For the past three years, COVID-19 has dominated headlines around the world, drastically changing our way of life.

However, while we were focused on the global pandemic, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) re-emerged with vengeance last season.<sup>1</sup> RSV typically circulates in the winter months, but the public health measures put in place to control the spread of COVID-19, such as social distancing and mask-wearing, have limited how freely RSV can circulate.<sup>1,2</sup>

As these measures are being lifted, RSV is making a comeback and its impact is being felt in many countries.<sup>3-5</sup> This past winter in the northern hemisphere, higher rates of RSV-related hospitalisations have been reported<sup>3-5</sup>, putting a significant strain on families and healthcare systems, and demonstrating an urgent need for us to be prepared for future winters.

### The unseen burden of RSV

Despite being described by some as a 'hidden virus', RSV is a leading cause of hospitalisation in infants under 12 months globally.<sup>6-11</sup> While its symptoms can often appear similar to a common cold, RSV can become severe very quickly and lead to bronchiolitis, pneumonia and even death in some severe cases.<sup>12</sup>

Contrary to belief, it's not just infants born pre-term or with other health conditions that are susceptible to RSV. A study involving 1554 participants in the U.S. found 67% (1047) of infants hospitalised with RSV were born at term with no underlying health condition.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, infants aged under 12 months are 16 times more likely to be hospitalised with RSV than influenza (flu), despite flu being much more widely known.<sup>13</sup>

Discover more about the true scale of RSV hospitalisations  
in the below video



### Beyond a hospital admission

The whirring and beeping of medical equipment, the bright lights and the separation from familiar faces makes being admitted to hospital with a frightening experience for an infant.

The first year of their life is supposed to be spent bonding with their family and creating cherished memories. However, for too many parents, thinking back to their infant's first year will bring back old trauma and images of them being rushed to the hospital, struggling to breathe.

The aftermath of having an infant get sick with RSV can have a damaging impact on the quality of life of both the infant and their parents. In one study of 117 children conducted in Spain, RSV was associated with a health-related quality of life loss in children and their parents of 38%, 32% and 9% during the first, second and third week after the diagnosis, respectively.<sup>14</sup>

“ I just remember it was very difficult, to see this small little boy that you can't do anything for. When he was transferred to the ICU, he was six weeks old and spent nearly 10 days on the ventilator there. That is something that you never want to experience ”

Sanne van Barneveld,  
Mother of an infant hospitalised with RSV

### A new dawn in RSV care

Following its significant impact on families, hospitals and healthcare systems last winter, RSV is getting its time in the media spotlight. Thankfully, this means that the signs and symptoms of RSV are becoming better known by communities, but it is important that we continue to support this recent positive momentum.

This improved awareness, accompanied with recent advancements in RSV prevention mean that parents may soon have multiple options to help protect their infant from the virus. Furthermore, new polymerase chain reaction (PCR) based tests for RSV and other respiratory viruses have been developed, offering faster diagnosis times.<sup>15</sup> Although there is no specific RSV treatment at this time, a faster diagnosis means infants can get the support they need sooner.

With these exciting developments, a "new normal" for RSV that involves prevention, diagnosis, and earlier treatment may be within reach. However, continued research and development is essential to fully realise this future in RSV and ensure that more families can avoid the devastating impact of RSV hospitalisation.

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