

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) and the Impact of Breastfeeding

You may be worried about respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and how it might affect your baby. This virus is very common. Most infants have had RSV by the time they are two years old. The older a baby is when they get it, the less severe the infection tends to be.

Studies show that breastfeeding has a protective effect against RSV. Breastfeeding does not prevent your baby from getting infected with this virus. However, all available studies show that breastfeeding reduces the seriousness of the illness. Babies who were breastfed for less than two months were more likely to be hospitalized when infected with RSV. Babies who were exclusively breastfed for more than four months were significantly less likely to be hospitalized and need oxygen when infected with RSV. Human milk has anti-bacterial, anti-viral and anti-inflammatory properties that boost your baby's own immune response to the virus. Human milk may also protect against serious airway damage.

If your baby was born premature, has lung disease, and/or heart disease these factors can complicate cases of RSV. The most effective ways to prevent illness is to limit exposure to the virus, wash hands regularly and continue to breastfeed. If you are concerned about your baby being exposed to the virus, ask people not to kiss or cuddle your baby.

If you have any breastfeeding questions or concerns, contact your local [La Leche League Canada Leader](#) who can provide you with support and information.

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References

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