



Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) in Infants

There has been much media coverage about respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) becoming a major problem in infants this fall.

The LLL Alliance Professional Liaison Department recently did a search for current literature regarding breastfeeding and RSV.

All the studies in the search found that breastfeeding is protective. The lack of breastfeeding in infants caused a higher rate of RSV. Lack of breastfeeding also resulted in more severe cases, many requiring oxygen therapy and a higher rate of admission to the pediatric ICU.

One of these studies was from 2019, in the journal *Clinical and Experimental Pediatrics* titled "Positive association of breastfeeding on respiratory syncytial virus infection in hospitalized infants: a multicenter retrospective study." This article states that the infants who were hospitalized were more likely to have been breastfed for two months or less or not breastfed at all. It also mentions that having RSV is "nearly universal" in children by their second birthday. (Generally, the older a healthy baby is when they get RSV, the milder it is. Often parents think it's just a cold.)

The other two articles are both from 2022. The first is from *The Journal of Pediatrics*, "Impact of Breastfeeding on the Incidence and Severity of RSV Bronchiolitis in Infants: Systemic Review," which mentions exclusive breastfeeding for greater than four months significantly lowering hospitalization and needing to use oxygen. It says that it appears that human milk may protect against serious airway damage.

The second article is from *Early Human Development*, "New strategies prevention of respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)," a brand new article from the November 2022 issue. It mentions hygiene, breastfeeding and passive immunization using Palivizumab (a monoclonal antibody therapy currently being used for high risk babies) as being the current prevention strategies. They also state that in the near future, monoclonal antibodies and maternal vaccination during pregnancy will play an important role.

There was no study found that indicates that breastfed infants are less likely to be infected, just that their cases are usually less severe. However, prematurity, lung disease, and heart disease can complicate cases. Limiting exposure, hand washing, and continuing to breastfeed seem to be most effective to prevent illness.

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