

RSV advice for Heart Families

What is respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)?

- RSV is a highly contagious, common respiratory virus that causes infection of the lungs/ respiratory tract
- It is the leading cause of hospitalisation for lower respiratory tract infections in infants
- In New Zealand, RSV is common between June and December, often referred to as *RSV season*
- Public health experts predict increased case numbers during the 2022 and 2023 RSV seasons as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic
- Children with symptoms of RSV illness will often have a nasal swab performed to confirm the diagnosis
- There is no specific treatment for RSV infection
 - In children with mild symptoms, treatment is supportive at home
 - In children with more severe illness, they will require admission to hospital. Supportive treatment can include breathing support with oxygen and additional fluids through a feeding tube or a line into the vein. Some children may need admission to the intensive care for extra support

Is my child vulnerable to RSV?

- Younger children under 2 years of age with particular chronic health conditions are at higher risk of severe illness with RSV infection (e.g. chronic lung conditions, infants born prematurely)
- Children with particular heart conditions are also at higher risk of severe illness with RSV infection. For these children, Palivizumab can be used to help offer protection against severe illness (see below)

What is Palivizumab and can my child receive it?

- Palivizumab is a specialised antibody injection into the muscle administered by a health professional every month during the RSV season to prevent severe illness caused by RSV
- Palivizumab is not used to treat someone who already has the infection
- The New Zealand Government has approved using Palivizumab for heart kids who are most vulnerable to severe illness. This includes:
 - Children 12 months and under with a significant heart disease **AND** any one of the following:
 - Unoperated simple congenital heart disease with significant left-to-right “shunt” (e.g. ventricular septal defect (VSD) on fluid medication such as Frusemide); OR

- Unoperated/unrepaired complex congenital heart disease (e.g. functionally single ventricle patients); OR
 - Severe pulmonary hypertension; OR
 - Moderate or worse pumping function of the left ventricle
- Paediatricians and Heart Specialists around New Zealand have compiled a list of eligible heart kids who should receive Palivizumab over the upcoming RSV season. These families will be contacted by their healthcare team to arrange administration of Palivizumab, which will start from the 1st of June 2022
- If you consent for your child to receive Palivizumab, it is important to present for each scheduled monthly clinic appointment for this to be given on time to ensure protection remains high across the RSV season
- Palivizumab is different from the standard childhood immunisations, and has been approved to be given at the same time as other immunisations
- If you have any questions, including whether your child is eligible, please contact our cardiac nurse specialist team at Starship Children's Hospital on (09) 630 9972