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# RSV: Respiratory virus can be life threatening

### STORY HIGHLIGHTS

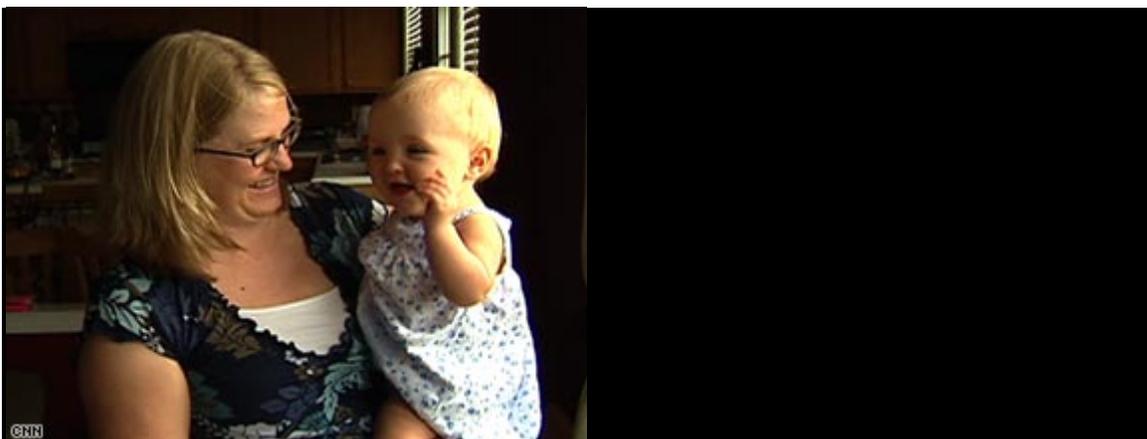
By age 2, most kids have been infected with respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV

For most, RSV causes cold-like symptoms; no specific treatment needed

Doctor: 1 in 300 normal term babies hospitalized each year because of RSV

By Judy Fortin

**CUMMING, Georgia (CNN)** -- Kamryn Campbell is only 16 months old, but she's been through more medical trauma than most people will suffer in a lifetime.



Because Kamryn Campbell, with mom Stephanie, had RSV, she's at increased risk for asthma.

To start with, Kamryn was born seven weeks premature. She spent nearly a month in a neonatal intensive care unit to help her lungs develop. Two weeks after being released, she was rushed back to the hospital in an ambulance, struggling to breathe.

"She turned gray and she wasn't breathing at all," recalls her mother, Stephanie Campbell of Cumming, Georgia. After undergoing testing, Kamryn was found to have respiratory syncytial virus or RSV.

"For you and me it's a really bad head cold," says pediatric pulmonologist Burt Lesnick. "But for those children at risk it can be life threatening."

This is the time of year when doctors' offices around the country see more tiny patients with the symptoms of RSV.

The American Academy of Pediatrics reports almost all children are infected with RSV at least once before they turn two years of age. Most of the time, the virus causes cold-like symptoms and no specific treatment is needed. For others, the infection is more dangerous.

Lesnick estimates one in 300 normal term babies will be hospitalized each year because of RSV. Premature infants fall into the high-risk category because of their underdeveloped lungs and difficulty in fighting infection. About one of every 30 preemies with RSV requires hospitalization.

The illness may start just like a cold with symptoms including a runny nose, cough and fever. Trouble sleeping and apnea may also be signs of RSV. Lesnick says that in many cases, RSV causes bronchiolitis, an inflammation of tiny airways called bronchioles, and viral pneumonia. A chest X-ray may be required to make a formal diagnosis.

#### **Fact Box**

To prevent the spread of RSV, doctors say you should:

Wash your hands frequently

Limit your baby's exposure to people with colds or fevers

Clean toys and countertops often

Don't share drinking cups

Don't allow infants to be around secondhand smoke

Source: CNN

Kamryn's case of RSV was so severe she was sedated and put on a ventilator during her hospital stay. Lesnick says RSV has no cure, and treatment is limited. "Antibiotics do not do any good," he said. "Steroids don't work ... almost nothing works." All doctors can do is make sure patients are well hydrated and receive oxygen if they need it. Then they wait.

"We couldn't hold her, we couldn't feed her and do all those things moms of newborns do," said Campbell. Sixteen days after being admitted to the hospital, Kamryn was allowed to go home. Her parents immediately took some common-sense precautions to make sure she didn't get sick again.

There is no vaccine for RSV, but some high-risk infants may be eligible to receive a shot of artificial antibodies to help protect them against serious complications. For the past decade, a drug called Synagis has been given to children under the age of 2 during RSV season, typically November through April. The injections need to be repeated once a month.

Little Kamryn is learning to walk now, but her parents don't plan on going out as much with her this winter. Once a child has the virus, the CDC reports, RSV causes repeated infections throughout life.

Lesnick also adds that while "Most children survive the infection and do well afterwards, unfortunately, many of them go on to develop asthma."