Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

What is RSV?
Respiratory Syncytial Virus ("res-pi-rah-tor-ee sin-sish-ell vi-rus") is often called "RSV." It is a viral illness that is very common in winter. Many of the symptoms are the same as cold symptoms and can last up to three weeks. Some infants with RSV may have severe coughing, wheezing and difficulty breathing. Wheezing is a musical noise that your baby makes when breathing. Some infants and children who get RSV may need to go into the hospital. **RSV is very contagious.** This means a child can give RSV to another child. RSV is spread by direct contact with fluids from the nose and mouth of a child who has RSV.

Possible symptoms
- Runny nose
- Difficulty breathing
- Sore throat
- Wheezing
- Fever
- Sneezing
- Cough
- Decreased appetite
- Fast breathing

What tests might be done?
A sample may be taken from your child's nose to collect drainage. The sample is sent to the hospital lab to test for RSV. A chest x-ray and blood tests may also be needed.

How is RSV treated?
Your child’s treatment may include:
- **Normal saline nose drops and suctioning:** Nose drops will help loosen the drainage in your child's nose. To make saline nose drops, add ½ teaspoon of salt to 1 cup of warm water. Place two to three drops into one nostril while your child is lying on their back. Use a bulb syringe to suction the excess drainage from your child's nose after placing the drops inside. Repeat in the other nostril. Use the drops at least four times a day. Your child may need to have their nose suctioned very often if there is a lot of drainage.
- **Humidifier:** Ask the doctor or nurse about using a cool mist humidifier at your child's bedside to help loosen nasal drainage.
- **Fluids:** Your child needs extra fluids. Offer small sips of clear liquids more often than usual. Infants should continue to breastfeed or drink formula.
- **Feeding:** Feed your child small amounts of food or 1 to 2 ounces of fluid every half-hour. This makes it less likely your child will vomit during coughing. Infants with "stuffed up" noses do not suck well from a bottle. Take the bottle out of your child's mouth frequently to allow your child to breathe through the mouth. A “sippy cup” may work better than a bottle. Suctioning your baby's nose before feeding may help them eat better.
- **Positioning:** The head of the bed will be raised up to help your child breathe easier.
Treatment (continued)

- **Medicines:** Your child may be given acetaminophen (Tylenol®, Panadol®, Tempra®) or ibuprofen (Motrin®, Advil®) to help bring a fever down. Some infants may benefit from medicated breathing treatments.

- **Handwashing:** Hand washing is very important for everyone. RSV lives on surfaces for up to 24 hours. You should wash toys, nuks, crib rails, etc.

If hospitalized, other treatments could include:

- **Isolation:** Your child must stay in the hospital room. Everyone will wash their hands before and after touching your child. Hospital staff will wear gowns and gloves. This will help prevent the spread of RSV.

- **Pulse oximeter:** This machine measures the amount of oxygen in your child's body. A probe will be placed on your child's hand or foot.

- **Oxygen:** If your child has trouble breathing, oxygen may be given.

- **IV fluids:** Your child may not be able to eat or drink if breathing is too fast or too hard. An IV may be used to give your child fluids.

- **Cardiac monitor:** This machine will measure your child's heart and breathing rate. Three small patches may be placed on the chest and stomach so the doctor and nurse can monitor how your child is doing.

**ALERT:** Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child:

- Has a temperature of 101.5°F (38.6°C) or higher or has a temperature of 100.5°F (38.1°C) or higher rectally if under 3 months of age.

- Is under 1 year old and has sunken eyes, no tears when crying and has not passed urine for eight hours (place a cotton ball in your child's diaper to see if urine has passed). These are signs of dehydration.

- Is older than 1 year old and has sunken eyes, no tears when crying and has not passed urine for 12 hours. These are signs of dehydration.

- Has a hard time breathing.

- Cannot drink or eat.

- Is much less active than normal.

- Has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

*This teaching sheet is meant to provide you with additional information about your child's care. Diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up should be provided by your health care professional.*