



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

National Child Health Public Health Programme, Health Service Executive

TO: All early learning and childcare service providers

FROM: Dr Abigail Collins, Consultant in Public Health Medicine; National Clinical Lead Child Health Public Health

RE: HSE Public Health update – Rise in Bronchiolitis infections in young children

DATE: 9th November 2022

As we enter in to the winter season, the usual respiratory infections become an important concern for providers, children and families. We hope the information here will help support your facilities and the children and families you care for.

We are seeing a significant increase in the rates of RSV infection; a respiratory virus which causes Bronchiolitis in young children. Symptoms of bronchiolitis usually include a runny/blocked nose, mild fever and cough. In babies, however, it can cause more significant difficulties in breathing and feeding and young babies are more likely to need hospital care. More details on Bronchiolitis can be found here:

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/bronchiolitis/>

We are now seeing a significant rise in cases in the 0-4 year old population and therefore it is important to act to minimise the onward spread of winter viruses, such as RSV, flu and Covid-19 in your facilities. The following guidance may assist you in your service and is also guidance that you can share with the families using your service.

Important measures

- 1) The most important measure is to ensure no child/adult attends your service if they are unwell.**

Many children might have a runny nose or a slight cough in winter season and they should not be stopped from attending if well with one mild symptom. However, if a child is feeling unwell with more significant symptoms, or combination of symptoms (cough, runny nose and mild fever) then they should be at home until the fever and their symptoms have gone. Children may have a persistent cough after infection for a few weeks; once the fever and any other symptoms have finished, they should not be excluded because of this persistent cough alone. . Spread of viruses, including RSV which causes Bronchiolitis, are more likely in children who are unwell with symptoms and therefore keeping children with symptoms out of services will help stop the spread to staff and other children, and help protect babies, who may well be more unwell if they get the infection. The same applies for staff; if staff are unwell they should not attend until their symptoms have resolved.

Older children and adults may not be particularly unwell with RSV, but a baby could become very unwell if infected. Therefore it is important to consider the interactions that older children / adults with symptoms have with babies within your facility to ensure such interactions are minimised even if they only have mild symptoms.

2) Infection, prevention and control measures

Many of the measures that we all got used to with Covid-19 are still important for the prevention and minimisation of onward spread of many infections. It is important that services and families encourage and help teach appropriate hygiene amongst young children, e.g. respiratory etiquette (coughing or sneezing in to their elbow) and appropriate hand washing. This applies to staff too. Usual recommended cleaning practices should be implemented.

3) Vaccination

There is no vaccine available against RSV infection; however children are also at risk of many other respiratory infections and there are vaccines available and recommended for influenza and Covid-19. Influenza vaccination is available for all children from 2 years of age and helps protect against severe infection with flu and onward spread. It is not an injection for children, but a nasal spray. More details can be found on the HSE website <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/flu/childrens-flu-vaccine/> Many adults are also recommended to have the flu vaccine and full details available here <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/flu/getting-the-vaccine/>

Vaccination for Covid-19 is still available and full details on Covid-19 vaccination for children and adults available at

<https://www2.hse.ie/screening-and-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccine/get-the-vaccine/children/>

Routine testing programmes specifically for Covid-19 are no longer running; the most important measure for the prevention of spread of *all* infections, particularly among young children, is to make sure anyone unwell / with significant symptoms (staff or child) does not attend.