



New survey reveals that almost two-thirds of parents are concerned about respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) this winter season.

3 in 4 parents would ask someone not to touch their child's face or hands to prevent the spread of the virus.

- In a recent survey conducted by Sanofi, almost two-thirds (63%) are concerned that their child may contract RSV this winter season and 74% said they would ask family members, friends, and acquaintances not to touch their child's face or hands as a preventative measure.¹
- Almost four out of five (79%) Irish parents had heard of RSV, but their overall understanding of the disease was low, with just 1 in 5 reporting a good level of knowledge of the disease.¹
- In 2022, RSV infections surged outside of the normal winter season, potentially as a consequence of COVID-19 social distancing measures and lockdown periods, meaning babies have had less exposure to typical childhood viruses.²
- This year RSV season began earlier and there has been an increase in hospital admissions.³
- RSV is highly contagious⁴, approximately 90% of children are infected with RSV by two years of age⁷, with RSV being the leading cause of lower respiratory tract infections in babies.⁸

Dublin, 6th October 2023 - Findings from a recent survey, commissioned by Sanofi are today published. The survey was conducted among 520 parents in Ireland, to understand their level of awareness and knowledge of RSV. There are several respiratory illnesses which may affect babies, but most infections only cause mild symptoms.⁵ Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a common virus that can cause infection in the lower part of the respiratory system. These are known as lower respiratory tract infections (LRTIs).⁶

The survey results revealed that almost four out of five (79%) Irish parents had heard of RSV but surprisingly their overall understanding of the resulting disease was low.¹ When asked how their knowledge of the disease compared with other common childhood illnesses only one in five (22%) of parents surveyed had a good level of knowledge of RSV in comparison to infections such as the common cold (74%), influenza (52%) and pneumonia (38%).¹

RSV is a major cause of severe respiratory illness among children under 2 years of age. It is also the most common cause of hospital admissions due to acute respiratory illness in young children, as well as being the most common cause of bronchiolitis (inflammation of the small airways in the lung) in infants.⁴ Approximately 90% of children are infected with RSV by 2 years of age, with RSV being the leading cause of LRTIs in babies.^{7,8} Cigarette smoke, overcrowding, and lack of breastfeeding have been suggested to increase the frequency and severity of RSV infections.^{14, 15}

Prof. Roy Philip, Consultant Neonatologist and Paediatrician, UL Hospitals Limerick, discusses the symptoms of RSV which in most cases are mild and clear up on their own, saying, *“RSV, or respiratory syncytial virus, infection initially presents with symptoms similar to a common cold. It's not uncommon for infants or young children to have runny nose, sniffles, fever, reduced feeding, irritability, or even ear infections. What's concerning is that in a proportion of infants, RSV encounter could lead to lower respiratory tract problems such as bronchiolitis or pneumonia. If parents notice rapid breathing, significantly reduced feeding, prolonged periods without wet nappies, or persistent high fever despite medication, it is advisable to consult your GP immediately. Moreover, in instances of obvious breathing difficulties significant pauses in breathing or unexplained lethargy/sleepiness, it's imperative to seek*

urgent medical attention from emergency services. Very premature infants and those with certain underlying medical conditions are more vulnerable to severe RSV infections, at times warranting critical care.”

Dr Maire Finn, GP at The Ennis Family Medical Centre shares some practical tips to prevent the spread of RSV, *“There are simple measures we can all take to minimise the spread of RSV. Frequent and careful handwashing with soap and water is one of the most important preventative actions. Always follow good cough etiquette by coughing into your sleeve or a tissue and encourage your children to do the same and if a sibling or other family member is symptomatic you should keep them away where possible.”*

Mandy Daly, Director of Advocacy and Policy Making at the Irish Neonatal Health Alliance (INHA) speaks about why the INHA community supports the campaign saying, *“At the INHA we support preterm infants that are more vulnerable and susceptible to infections, for which they are particularly dangerous. RSV is a common respiratory illness, yet many parents and caregivers are unaware of the risks. October is RSV Awareness month so it is a good opportunity to remind parents and caregivers of infants of the signs and symptoms of RSV.”*

In Ireland, the RSV season is defined by the HSE as starting at the beginning of October and ending in late February (Calendar Week 40 – Week 8).⁹ This year the HSE-Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) anticipated an early RSV season. RSV has been a notifiable disease in Ireland since January 2012 and RSV activity in Ireland is monitored by the HPSC.⁴ Precautionary steps can also be taken to help protect infants. These include:^{4,10}

- Frequent, careful hand washing is the most important measure in preventing the spread of RSV
- Coughing into your sleeve
- Keeping symptomatic siblings and other people away.

When asked about preventive measures against RSV nearly three-quarters (74%) of respondents said that they would ask family members, friends, and acquaintances not to touch their child’s hands or faces to prevent the spread of RSV. ¹

According to the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) and the Irish Neonatal Health Alliance (INHA), symptoms of RSV can often resemble a cold at the beginning, including:^{4,10}

- Fever
- Running nose
- Sniffles
- Wheezing
- Decreased appetite
- Ear infections (in children)

Lower respiratory tract infections, such as pneumonia or pneumonitis, are most likely to occur during a child's first infection with RSV and may develop in 30-70% of first infections.⁴

Furthermore, babies are at risk of more severe RSV illnesses such as croup, bronchiolitis and pneumonia.^{4,11}

The HSE recommends that parents or caregivers contact a GP if they are worried about their baby’s symptoms, or notice that they:¹²

- Are not feeding normally (they have taken less than half of their usual amount over the previous 24 hours)
- Have not had a wet nappy for 12 hours or more
- Are breathing very fast
- Have a persistent high temperature of 38°C or above despite giving paracetamol and/or ibuprofen
- Seem very tired or irritable
- If you remain worried about your child

If parents or caregivers are concerned about RSV they should speak to a healthcare professional. Furthermore, the HSE recommends immediately calling 999 for an ambulance if a parent or caregiver notices that:¹³

- The infant/child has difficulty breathing
- If there are long pauses in the child or infant's breathing.

New information site for parents

Following the survey findings, Sanofi has launched an informative website <https://rsv.sanofi.ie/> that provides accurate information about RSV to complement HSE advice. The survey and website form part of a nationwide RSV campaign, Together Against RSV.

For the latest HSE guidance on all respiratory tract infections, visit: <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/respiratorysyncytialvirus/factsheet/>

About Sanofi

Sanofi is dedicated to supporting people through their health challenges. We are a global biopharmaceutical company focused on human health. We prevent illness with vaccines and provide innovative treatments to fight pain and ease suffering. We stand by the few who suffer from rare diseases and the millions with long-term chronic conditions.

With more than 100,000 people in 100 countries, Sanofi is transforming scientific innovation into healthcare solutions around the globe.

For further information, visit <https://rsv.sanofi.ie/>

Media Relations Contacts

Laura Greer, Etch Communications - 086 960 5600 / laura@etchcomms.ie

Ciara O'Driscoll, Etch Communications - 087 6893600 / ciara@etchcomms.ie

References

¹ Research survey was conducted by Toluna on behalf of Sanofi Ireland. Sample size 520. The survey took place from the 10th August to the 1st September 2023 (Data on file).

² COVID-19: Preparing for the future. Looking ahead to winter 2021/22 and beyond. 15 July 2021. Retrieved October 2023, from Academy of Medical Sciences website: <https://acmedsci.ac.uk/file-download/4747802>

³ NIAC Meeting Summary May 2023 Meeting Summary. Retrieved October 2023 from https://rcpi.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_b03be43b-b9d7-45d5-8a40-CBCD5513BF24/

- ⁴ Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV). (Last reviewed: 01 December 2022). Retrieved October 2023, from Health Protection Surveillance Centre Website: <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/respiratorysyncytialvirus/factsheet/>
- ⁵ Tregoning, JS and Schwarze J. Respiratory viral Infections in infants: Causes, clinical symptoms, virology, and immunology. Clin Microbiol Revs. 2010 Jan; 23(1): 74–98
- ⁶ Verwey, C. and Nunes, M. C. (2020). RSV lower respiratory tract infection and lung health in the first 2 years of life. The Lancet. Global Health, 8(10), e1247–e1248
- ⁷ Wennergren, G. and Kristjansson, S. Relationship between respiratory syncytial virus bronchiolitis and future obstructive airway diseases. Eur Respir J. 2001; 18:1044–1058 DOI: 10.1183/09031936.01.00254101
- ⁸ Zar, H. J., Nduru, P., Stadler, J. A. M., Gray, D., Barnett, W., Lesosky, M., Myer, L., Nicol, M. P. (2020). Early life respiratory syncytial virus lower respiratory tract infection in a South African birth cohort: epidemiology and effect on lung health. The Lancet. Global Health, 8(10), e1316–e1325
- ⁹ Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV). (Last reviewed: 6 June 2023). Retrieved October 2023, from Health Protection Surveillance Centre Website: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/immunisation/hcpinfo/guidelines/rsvch18a.pdf>
- ¹⁰ Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV). (n.d.). Retrieved October 2023, from Irish Neonatal Health Alliance: <https://www.inha.ie/rsv/>
- ¹¹ Croup. (n.d.). Retrieved October 2023, from Johns Hopkins Medicine website: <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/croup>
- ¹² RSV (respiratory syncytial virus). (Last reviewed: 9 February 2023). Retrieved October 2023, from the HSE website: <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/rsv/>
- ¹³ Bronchiolitis. Retrieved October 2023, from Health Service Executive (HSE): <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/bronchiolitis/>
- ¹⁴ Impact of breast feeding. BMJ Global Health. Retrieved October 2023, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9906265/>
- ¹⁵ RSV: A Comprehensive Review of Transmission, Pathophysiology, and Manifestation. National Library of Medicine. Retrieved October 2023 from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10111061/>