Written by Claire Orphan
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Flu season is wreaking havoc around the country, and yet another seasonal illness, respiratory syncytial virus or RSV, appears to be peaking in Illinois. In fact, according to CDC surveillance data, almost all states are reporting epidemic levels, including:

- **AZ** – 25%
- **CA** – 39%
- **FL** – 12%
- **GA** – 29%
- **IL – 23%**
- **LA** – 27%
- **NY** – 15%
- **OH** – 39%
- TX – 29%

RSV is considered having reached epidemic levels once rates of positive cases are at or above 10% for two consecutive weeks.

Background:

It's a virus that's often mistaken for a common cold, but this highly prevalent, easily-spread illness can be devastating and it's affecting young infants across the country. It's called respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and if contracted, it can bring serious complications to young infants, particularly to preemies whose underdeveloped lungs and immature immune systems make it harder to fight off the infection. In fact, RSV is the leading cause of infant hospitalization—about 125,000 each year—and is responsible for approximately 10 times more infant deaths each year than the flu.

According to the CDC, "RSV season" typically runs from November through March. All children can contract RSV, and nearly 100% of babies do by age two. Unfortunately, there is no cure for RSV, so prevention is key to protecting against this virus, which is highly contagious, particularly among children. For instance, daycare and pre-schools are common areas where children can contract RSV, but there are steps daycare providers and parents can take to help protect children.

Frequent washing of hands, toys, play areas and bedding is important, as RSV can live for several hours on surfaces such as countertops, doorknobs and tissues. Other preventative measures include keeping children away from those who are sick and never letting anyone smoke around the baby. Although RSV can be mild in many children, it's best to air on the side of caution for the sake of other children. Parents of children who have cold-like symptoms should keep them home from daycare, to avoid exposing other children (especially those who may be at high-risk) from potentially dangerous germs.

Nationally recognized RSV expert **Dr. Ram Yogev, MD of Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago and Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine**
is available to answer common RSV questions and talk about how it impacts children and their families:

- What is RSV, and what are the risk factors for developing severe RSV disease?

- What symptoms should parents look for and flag for their child's pediatrician?

- What can parents do to try to prevent their child from contracting RSV?

- How can parents help keep their child from spreading germs and illnesses to other children?