Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

RSV is the most common cause of lower respiratory infection in infants. RSV is a virus. This virus affects the smaller airway branches. RSV can cause:

- Common colds.
- Bronchiolitis (swelling and mucus build up in the smallest air passages of the lungs). Symptoms of RSV bronchiolitis include coughing, wheezing, breathing difficulty, and fever.
- Pneumonia.
- Children can also become dehydrated from being unable to drink.

In severe cases hospital care may be necessary. Children more likely to become sicker with RSV are:

- Preterm and young infants.
- Those with asthma or other chronic heart and lung problems.
- Those with low immune systems.

Most of the time RSV infections last about a week. The symptoms are usually worse around the second or third day, but the cough may last for weeks. Home treatment for bronchiolitis includes:

- Bed rest. Use pillows to elevate your child's head as this may make breathing a little easier. For infants place a towel or pillow underneath the mattress pad.
- A cool-mist vaporizer or humidifier in your child's room may help.
- Avoid exposure to cigarette and other smoke which irritate the airway.
- Increase clear liquids (water, fruit juice). For infants the use of an oral rehydration solution is preferred over plain water.
- Suction the nose with a bulb syringe after placing a few drops of warm water or saline nose drops in each nostril to remove secretions.

Decongestant or cough medicine may be used to relieve symptoms for children over 2 years of age as instructed by your caregiver but are often not helpful. An inhaled medicine may be also prescribed for more severe wheezing and breathing difficulty.

You should have your child checked by a doctor if the symptoms are not getting better after 2 days of treatment. **Call right away or go to the emergency room if your child becomes exhausted, has increased breathing difficulty, excessive wheezing, bluish lips or a gray-blue color to the skin, severe cough, very thick green or yellow nasal secretions, repeated vomiting, dehydration, or a high fever.**

Document Released: 01/25/2006 Document Re-Released: 03/14/2011
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.