

3 August 2021

Lobby New Zealand

By email: fyi-request-16014-eb7a032f@requests.fyi.org.nz
Ref: H202108344

Tēnā koe Lobby New Zealand

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) on 8 July 2021 for:

“...all resources provided and all communications between the Ministry of Health, or any other relevant agency, and education providers in New Zealand, including pre-schools, kindergartens, primary schools, etc, regarding the ongoing nationwide RSV outbreak.”

Three documents have been identified within the scope of your request and copies are enclosed. My decision on the release of each document is outlined in the Appendix 1 table.

I trust this information fulfils your request. Under section 28(3) of the Act you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by calling 0800 802 602.

Nākū noa, nā



Deborah Woodley
**Deputy Director-General
Population Health and Prevention**

Appendix 1: List of documents for release

#	Date	Title	Decision on release
1	N/A	Regional Public Health Winter respiratory illness Information for ECCs, Kindergartens and Kohanga Reo	Released in full
2	N/A	Southern District Health Board Information Sheet Respiratory Syncytial Virus Fact Sheet	
3	12 July 2021	Email correspondence between Ministry officials and Ministry of Education officials Re: RSV comms	Released with some information withheld under: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• section 9(2)(a) of the Act, to protect privacy of natural persons.• section 9(2)(g)(i) to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions by or between or to Ministers and officers and employees of any public service agency.

Winter respiratory illness

Information for ECCs, Kindergartens and Kohanga Reo

Kia ora koutou

Currently a lot of pre-school children in the Wellington region are unwell. At this time of year respiratory viruses including respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) are common in the community and illnesses can be easily spread in schools and early childhood centres. Adults and older children get milder RSV illness but can pass it on to babies so we strongly recommend that people maintain good hand hygiene, stay home if they have any symptoms of a respiratory tract illness

Respiratory viruses cause the following symptoms: fever (temperature $\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}$ or feeling hot, sweaty, and chills), cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache and fatigue/ tiredness, and sometimes diarrhoea and vomiting especially with small children.

Please advise parents and caregivers if they are worried about their child's symptoms or if their child has long-term health problems (e.g. asthma, diabetes, kidney, heart or immunity problems), then they should phone their family doctor or Healthline for free on 0800 611 116 for further advice. Most people recover at home and only need to see their doctor if the illness gets worse or is not improving.

If adults or children develop concerning symptoms, such as rapid breathing, difficulty breathing, chest pain, severe vomiting, or if a child is not responding or is difficult to wake up, they should seek medical attention immediately – including calling 111 for an ambulance if it is an emergency.

COVID-19

Winter respiratory illness symptoms can be similar to COVID-19 symptoms. Children under 11 years of age are not routinely tested for COVID-19 **UNLESS** the child:

- has been in contact with a COVID-19 case
- returned from a place where there is COVID-19
- left managed isolation in the last 14 days
- or the doctor is concerned that the child has COVID-19.

Adults and teens with relevant respiratory symptoms **DO** require COVID-19 testing if they have a respiratory illness. Call Healthline for free on 0800 611 116 for further advice on COVID-19 testing

Controlling illness at your early learning centre

- Remind parents and caregivers of your centre's illness policy
- Anyone who is unwell should stay at home until 24 hours after symptoms have stopped and they are well. These symptoms usually last a week but in some cases, can last longer.
- Ensure excellent hand washing and drying for children and staff
- Increase cleaning of frequently touched surfaces, especially at child height
- Open doors and windows to increase ventilation
- Please notify RPH by calling 04 570 9002 if a child from your centre is hospitalised or you have large numbers of children from your centre away (more than 15% of the total roll).

The following link has some good tips for looking after people with influenza like illness and stopping it spreading to other people at home: <https://www.rph.org.nz/public-health-topics/early-childhood-centres/fact-sheets/colds-and-flu-what-to-do-if-your-child-is-sick.pdf>

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Fact Sheet

Public Health South

Dunedin: Private Bag 1921, Dunedin 9054

Ph: 03 476 9800 Fax: 03 476 9858

Invercargill: PO Box 1601, Invercargill 9840

Ph: 03 211 8500 Fax: 03 214 9070

Queenstown: PO Box 2180, Frankton, Queenstown 9349

Ph: 03 450 9156 Fax: 03 450 9169

What is RSV?

Respiratory Syncytial Virus, or RSV, is a common respiratory virus that usually causes mild, cold-like symptoms. Anyone can get an RSV infection, but infections in adults is usually less severe. It commonly occurs in children aged two and under with children often exposed outside of the home such as a childcare centre or school. Once acquired they can then transmit the infection to other family members.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually include:

- Congested or runny nose
- Dry cough
- Low-grade fever
- Sore throat
- Sneezing
- Headache

These symptoms usually develop within 4 to 6 days after being infected with the virus. The symptoms can appear in stages and not all at once. Infants with RSV may not show any symptoms other than irritability and listlessness. Most people recover in a week to ten days and do not need to be hospitalised.

RSV can spread to the lower respiratory tract and can cause more serious infections such as bronchiolitis, an inflammation of the small airways in the lung, and pneumonia, an infection of the lungs. It can also make chronic health conditions worse.

Severe symptoms may include:

- Short, shallow and rapid breathing
- Struggling to breathe — chest muscles and skin pull inward with each breath
- Cough
- Poor feeding in children
- Unusual tiredness (lethargy)
- Irritability

There are some people who are more likely to develop a severe RSV infection and may need to be hospitalised. Those at a higher risk for severe disease include:

- Premature infants
- Young children with congenital (from birth) heart or chronic lung disease
- Young children with compromised (weakened) immune systems due to a medical condition or medical treatment
- Adults with compromised immune systems
- Older adults, especially those with underlying heart or lung disease

If adults or children develop concerning symptoms, such as rapid breathing, difficulty breathing, chest pain, severe vomiting, or if a child is not responding or is difficult to wake up, they should seek medical attention immediately – including calling 111 for an ambulance if it is an emergency.

Many of the symptoms are similar to those of COVID-19. COVID-19 testing is important for any adult with these symptoms. Unlike teenagers and adults, children 11 years and under with these symptoms don't always need to be tested for COVID-19.

If a child has been in contact with a COVID-19 case, returned from a place where there is COVID-19, or left managed isolation in the last 14 days, the parents are advised to ring Healthline (0800 611 116) for advice on testing.

How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment for most cases. It is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Fevers and pain can be managed with over-the-counter fever reducers and pain relievers. Talk to your doctor before giving your child non-prescription cold medicines as they may contain some ingredients that are not suitable for children.

If symptoms are severe consult a doctor.

How is it spread?

RSV can be spread when:

- An infected person coughs or sneezes
- You get virus droplets from a cough or sneeze in your eyes, nose, or mouth
- You touch a surface that has the virus on it, like a doorknob, and then touch your face before washing your hands
- You have direct contact with the virus, like kissing the face of a child with RSV

How do you prevent the spread to others?

People infected with RSV are usually contagious for 3 to 8 days with symptoms usually lasting about a week. However, some infants, and people with weakened immune systems, may have symptoms for longer and can continue to spread the virus even after they stop showing symptoms, for as long as 4 weeks.

The risk of spreading RSV to others is greatly reduced if you:

- **Wash your hands frequently.** Teach your children the importance of handwashing.
- **Avoid exposure.** Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze. Limit your contact with people who have fevers or colds.
- **Keep things clean.** Make sure kitchen and bathroom benchtops, doorknobs, and handles are clean. Discard used tissues right away.

- **Don't share drinking glasses with others.** Use your own glass or disposable cups when you or someone else is sick. Label each person's cup.
- **Don't smoke.** Babies who are exposed to tobacco smoke have a higher risk of getting RSV and potentially more-severe symptoms. If you do smoke, don't smoke inside the house or car.
- **Wash toys regularly.** Do this especially when your child or a playmate is sick.

When can I return to day care, school or work?

Anyone who is unwell should stay at home until 24 hours after symptoms have stopped and they are well.

For further information, contact a Health Protection Officer located at Public Health South offices (contact details are listed top right on page 1 or your local Public Health Nurse.

Released under the Official Information Act 1982

From: Lucy Hall
Sent: Monday, 12 July 2021 10:12 am
To: Natasha Dingle <Natasha.Dingle@education.govt.nz>
Cc: Media Responses Shared Mailbox <Media@education.govt.nz>
Subject: RE: RSV comms

Kia ora Natasha,

If it's not too late here is some words:

RSV update

There has been considerable media coverage regarding the RSV virus, which is impacting babies and young children.

Colds, flu and respiratory virus outbreaks are more common at this time of year and these illnesses can be easily spread in schools and early childhood centres.

RSV is highly contagious and spreads very easily between people. Most adults and older children with RSV will experience symptoms similar to the common cold. However, very young children and premature babies can become seriously ill and may require hospitalisation.

Please remember to keep up the usual hygiene measures - practice good hand hygiene, stay home if unwell and seek medical advice if you're concerned about your or someone else's health. It's important to:

- stay home and stay away from toddlers and babies if you are sick
- child, toddlers and babies should not attend childcare centres or school until their symptoms have resolved
- continue to use good hand hygiene - ensure children and staff are regularly washing and drying hands
- cough and sneeze into your elbows, carefully discard dirty tissues
- increase the cleaning of frequently touched surfaces, especially at child height. Toys which are shared among children should be washed in warm water and detergent at the end of the day, or session, or more often if they are sneezed on or mouthed.
- do not share cups, glasses or cutlery

The annual influenza season will be managed by regional Public Health services, and their response may be different across DHBs. You may have received a fact sheet put out by the Auckland Regional Public Health Service or the Wellington Regional Public Health service, which is available on their websites.

[Parent factsheet on colds and flu - ARPHS website](#)

[Parent factsheet on colds and flu - Wellington Regional Public Health website](#)

More Information on RSV is available on the Ministry of Health website

<https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv>

Funding [unchanged from before]

We have been receiving many questions about funding and what to do, should there be a higher than usual number of absences. The ECE funding system has seen its fair share of annual influenza, floods and even a pandemic. We have a number of supports in places, including:

- **The three week rule** - which allows funding for 3 weeks of continuous absence regardless of reason. [See 6-5 of the funding handbook](#)
- **The frequent absence rule** - which allows for three months of irregular attendance before an enrolment agreement needs to be reconfirmed or changed. [See Chapter 6-7 of the funding handbook](#)

- **The Absence rule exemption process (also called EC12/13 process)** which gives an additional 12 weeks of absence funding.
 - [Chapter 7-7 Absence rule exemptions](#)
 - [EC12 Absence Rule Exemption Application Form \[PDF, 142KB\]](#)
 - [EC13 Form Supporting Medical Certificate \[PDF, 43KB\]](#)
- **Emergency closure** – in the unlikely event that a Medical Officer of Health directs a service to close temporarily. [See Chapter 7-5 of the Funding Handbook.](#)
- Discretionary hours - available to cover absences when a replacement certificated teacher cannot be found. As always, services should have evidence of attempts made to locate a certificated teacher to cover any absences.

If you have any questions please send your queries to ECE.info@education.govt.nz.

Ngā mihi
Lucy

From: Natasha Dingle <Natasha.Dingle@education.govt.nz>
Sent: Monday, 12 July 2021 8:15 am
To: Lucy Hall <Lucy.Hall@health.govt.nz>
Cc: Media Responses Shared Mailbox <Media@education.govt.nz>
Subject: RE: RSV comms

Thanks Lucy.

Apologies for the urgency and inaccuracies. I'll pass this on to our ECE team.

From: Lucy Hall <Lucy.Hall@health.govt.nz>
Sent: Monday, 12 July 2021 8:13 AM
To: Natasha Dingle <Natasha.Dingle@education.govt.nz>
Cc: Media Responses Shared Mailbox <Media@education.govt.nz>
Subject: RE: RSV comms

Hi Natasha,

I've sent this to the team for an urgent review – but I'm a little concerned that some of this isn't quite accurate.

If you do need to send it before I am able to have this properly reviewed by the experts. Please can you tweak it as below.

Ngā mihi
Lucy

From: Natasha Dingle <Natasha.Dingle@education.govt.nz>
Sent: Monday, 12 July 2021 7:23 am
To: Lucy Hall <Lucy.Hall@health.govt.nz>
Cc: Media Responses Shared Mailbox <Media@education.govt.nz>
Subject: Re: RSV comms

Asap today sorry

Get [Outlook for Android](#)

From: Lucy Hall <Lucy.Hall@health.govt.nz>
Sent: Monday, July 12, 2021 7:07:28 AM
To: Natasha Dingle <Natasha.Dingle@education.govt.nz>
Cc: Media Responses Shared Mailbox <Media@education.govt.nz>
Subject: Re: RSV comms

Hi Natasha,

Thanks for sending through this draft.

When's your deadline for this? I expect we may like to suggest some tweaks.

Cheers,

Lucy Hall (she/her) | Senior Communications and Engagement Advisor
Office of the Director-General
s 9(2)(a)
lucy.hall@health.govt.nz
Ministry of Health, 133 Molesworth Street Thorndon, Wellington 6011



s 9(2)(g)(i)

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s 9(2)(g)(i)

From: Lucy Hall <Lucy.Hall@health.govt.nz>
Sent: Friday, 9 July 2021 4:15 PM
To: Natasha Dingle <Natasha.Dingle@education.govt.nz>
Subject: RE: RSV comms

Perfect. Thanks Natasha.
Will be in touch!

From: Natasha Dingle <Natasha.Dingle@education.govt.nz>
Sent: Friday, 9 July 2021 4:13 pm
To: Lucy Hall <Lucy.Hall@health.govt.nz>; Media Responses Shared Mailbox <Media@education.govt.nz>
Subject: RE: RSV comms

Hi Lucy,

We don't yet have someone working on this but I'm happy to work with you. I'll check in with our ECE team about how they want to manage that.

Many thanks,

Natasha

From: Lucy Hall <Lucy.Hall@health.govt.nz>
Sent: Friday, 9 July 2021 4:10 PM
To: Media Responses Shared Mailbox <Media@education.govt.nz>
Subject: RSV comms

Hello,

I'll be working on some national communications on RSV next week, to support the public health response to RSV.

Would be keen to link in with someone from education, particularly re advice to ECEs. Do you know if there's anyone in your comms team working on this?

Ngā mihi
Lucy

Lucy Hall
Senior Communications Advisor
Ministry of Health
Mobile: s 9(2)(a)
<http://www.health.govt.nz>

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