

PRINT-At-home monitoring for babies with respiratory illness surpasses last season

OSF On Call, the digital health arm of Peoria, Illinois-based OSF HealthCare has enrolled nearly 80 more babies and toddlers in a program to monitor at home, those with respiratory illness. The program provides support for patients with a pediatric respiratory virus. Enrollment offers a connection to OSF OnCall care teams 24/7 and monitoring tools that will aid in proactive response to worsening respiratory virus symptoms, keeping infants and toddlers out of the hospital.

September through January of this year, the program enrolled 966 children compared to 890 a year ago. This comes as the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) announced that after a one-week dip, the state's [overall respiratory illness level has ticked up again](#) from Moderate to High, driven by a notable increase in emergency department (ED) visits and hospital admissions for flu.

The program requires a referral from a medical provider and is for babies and toddlers 5 and under with a confirmed diagnosis. Referrals can be made by providers in a hospital emergency department, OSF OnCall Urgent Care, OSF PromptCare, medical offices, or following hospital discharge.

Mary Stapel, MD, lead physician for Community Care for OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center says RSV and other respiratory infections can often be managed at home.

"For the more common cold type symptoms, we can recommend the conservative treatments at home nasal saline with some suctioning, a cool mist humidifier you know, just kind of frequent, small feedings to optimize keeping that child hydrated."

Clinical Digital Care Supervisor Rose Smith, RN, says OSF OnCall was able to implement its 24/7 digitally enabled, at-home support program for RSV so quickly two years ago because of its experience with similar monitoring to help patients with chronic conditions such as diabetes and heart failure. Smith says parents and caregivers have loved it.

"They love having support anytime in the day, however they want to do it – text message, phone call, anything. They can send us pictures. We've really kind of taken that to tailor what parents need to feel comfortable taking their children home, you know, from a clinic; from the hospital during the scary time."

An OSF OnCall software application provides education and notifications to report relevant signs/symptoms over 10 days. Smith says upon enrollment, parents or guardians receive a care kit for at-home use from their provider following a visit or a digital community health worker can deliver one.

"So we have a pulse oximeter to monitor oxygen levels and their heart rate and then we have a thermometer and we also provide saline spray, and then a bulb syringe. A lot of parents, when their babies are born, they use them in the hospital, but they might not know that they can use them to help relieve any secretions especially before feeding their children."

Smith adds, it's also important to clear the nose before a nap or bedtime. Parents also receive step-by-step written instructions as well as a video demonstration for how to use what's provided in the kit.

Smith says parents who have a child in the program can request a video visit at any time. The OSF OnCall nurse will also recommend a video visit if needed.

"If they think their child looks off, we just have another set of eyes. The providers will look at it (to see if they need a higher level of care). Sometimes our nurses can tell the parents you know, 'We think they need to be seen. Can we do a video visit just before you take your child out, especially now that it's colder out?' You know, we don't want them if they're having trouble breathing to go outside, but we really just focus on what works best to still get them the care that they need."

Dr. Stapel advises making sure you and everyone around you practices good hand hygiene, coughs into the inside of their elbow, and stays home from parties and other obligations if you are sick.

If you suspect your child has symptoms of RSV, the flu, or some other respiratory virus that *don't* appear life-threatening, you can reach out to your pediatrician, primary care provider or [OSF OnCall Urgent Care](#) which also has a virtual visit option anytime.