

PRINT-OnCall expands remote monitoring for babies, toddlers with respiratory viruses

Effort provides support for patients-parents, and frees up clinics and hospital beds

A year ago, amid the worst flu season in more than a decade and an early start to RSV, [OSF OnCall](#) launched a no-cost, at-home monitoring program for infants and toddlers up to age 5.

Now, the program from the digital health arm of OSF HealthCare will provide support not only for RSV patients and caregivers in the comfort of their own homes, but it will extend the program for other viral infections including the flu, rhinovirus, croup, and pneumonia among others. Enrollment offers a connection to OSF OnCall care teams 24/7 and monitoring tools that will aid in proactive response to worsening symptoms, keeping infants and toddlers out of the hospital.

RSV is the number one reason for hospitalization of children under age 1 in the United States. It can lead to other infections including bronchiolitis (inflammation of the small airways in the lung) and pneumonia (infection of the lungs), especially in babies.

However, 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 a year ago because of its experience with similar monitoring to help patients with chronic conditions such as diabetes and heart failure. This year, OSF OnCall is building on the RSV experience by expanding the remote monitoring for *all* pediatric respiratory viruses for newborns and children up to age 5. Smith says they love 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."

OSF OnCall providers and parents or caregivers use a software application that provides education and notifications to report relevant signs/symptoms over 10 days. Smith says upon enrollment, parents 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.

The OSF OnCall respiratory illness RPM program is for anyone in Illinois or Michigan. Patients must have a positive test or diagnosis of a respiratory infection to qualify. Referrals can be made by providers in a hospital emergency department, OSF OnCall Urgent Care, OSF PromptCare, medical offices, or following hospital discharge.

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.”

Last year, the remote monitoring program for RSV enrolled a total of 254 babies and toddlers since early December when the program launched. So far this year, 221 pediatric patients have been added into the expanded RPM program since it began in September.

At OSF HealthCare and across the country, there is concern indoor family gatherings for the holidays could accelerate the transmission of RSV, the flu, COVID-19, and other viral illnesses. 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 they 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 option anytime.