

PRINT--As COVID, Flu and RSV threaten again, OSF OnCall offers parents 24/7 help at home

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) expects the upcoming fall and winter respiratory disease season in the United States will likely have a similar number of combined peak hospitalizations due to COVID-19, influenza, and RSV compared to last season.

As the respiratory virus season arrives, [OSF OnCall](#) is also reminding parents that it offers an at-home monitoring and support program for babies and toddlers 5 and under who have an infection from a respiratory virus. Those include: the flu, rhinovirus, croup, pneumonia, and others including RSV, 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.

The digital health arm of OSF HealthCare will provide support for patients with a pediatric respiratory virus and caregivers in the comfort of their own homes. 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.

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.

How it works

"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.

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 season, the remote monitoring program for pediatric respiratory viruses enrolled a total of 717 babies and toddlers from September through April.

At OSF HealthCare and across the country, there is concern a return to school and more activities moving indoors this fall 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 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.