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**Surge in respiratory illness in children in Hawke’s Bay**

Key health messages:

o   wash / sanitise hands regularly

o   Cover your mouth or cough into elbow

o   Stay home if unwell

o   Maintain a smoke-free environment

o   Maintain a warm dry home

o   Seek medical help if child is unwell

o   Adults with respiratory illness should have a Covid test.

o   If you are worried about your child’s symptoms call your GP or ring

Healthline 0800 611 116 for advice

Hawke’s Bay paediatricians are urging parents with sick children who have a cold with a chesty cough to keep them warm at home and to get medical attention if they get worse.

Paediatrician Daniel Riviere said there had been a surge in sick children with respiratory illnesses needing hospital care with several needing intensive care over the past few weeks.

Dr Riviere said many of the sickest children had all tested positive to RSV, (respiratory syncytial virus), which causes infections of the lungs and airways. While it was a very common illness some children could get very sick with pneumonia or bronchiolitis.

“Last year there were no notifications of RSV in Hawke’s Bay, but this year there has been a surge, which can happen every four – five years, or it may simply be because there was no illness circulating last year so less children are immune this year.”

“While no-one knows exactly what has caused the surge in illness, at the moment, it’s very important that sick children are kept warm, in a smoke-free environment at home and if they don’t start getting better parents or caregivers need to seek medical advice from a GP, urgent medical centre or call Healthline on 0800 611 116 for advice,” Dr Riviere said.

RSV usually clears up by itself after a few days, but it can be particularly severe in babies and smaller children and parents and caregivers should seek medical attention urgently if their baby or child has:

·         Audible wheezing sounds.

·         Breathing very fast

·         Laboured breathing — the ribs seem to suck inward when the child breathes in

·         Seems very unwell

·         Sluggish or lethargic

Medical Officer of Health Rachel Eyre said Hawke’s Bay DHB was also checking a number of respiratory outbreaks at a number of Early Childhood Education Centres and schools, which were likely to be RSV.

She said it was important parents and caregivers understood that RSV could be contagious for over a week (3-8 days and ranging up to 4 weeks) so it was vitally important to stay at home when sick and keep sick children at home, apply cough etiquette by coughing into your elbow, and to wash your hands often.