

**SYNAGIS (Palivizumab)
Information for Parents**

**Neonatal Intensive Care Unit
Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center**

When premature infants catch colds and other respiratory infections, they often have more trouble than full-term babies do. Premature babies who catch common respiratory tract infections occasionally must return to the hospital for treatment. The most common virus that causes serious respiratory infection is called RSV (respiratory syncytial virus). RSV can cause a simple cold in some infants; however, it can occasionally cause infections (bronchiolitis and pneumonia) that may require your baby to be admitted to the hospital. In addition, babies who have serious RSV infections are more likely to have lung problems, such as asthma, in the future.

Synagis (Palivizumab) is a drug that can help prevent serious RSV infection in premature infants. It is made of monoclonal antibodies specific for the RSV virus. It is produced in a laboratory using recombinant biotechnology.

Who should receive *Synagis*?

At Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, we recommend that the following groups of babies receive *Synagis*:

1. Babies born before 29 0/7ths weeks' gestation
2. Babies who are born between 29 and 32 weeks gestation and who have an oxygen need for at least 28 days after birth

In addition, certain babies with congenital heart disease, lung or neurologic abnormalities, or immune system deficiencies may also benefit from *Synagis*.

How is *Synagis* given?

Synagis is given as a "shot" (intramuscular injection) during the winter respiratory infection season. Usually the respiratory infection season starts in November and ends in April. Your pediatric care provider will determine how many times your baby will need *Synagis*.

Will *Synagis* guarantee that my baby will not catch RSV?

No. *Synagis* boosts your baby's immunity to RSV. It reduces the severity of the infection. For some babies, this means that they will not have to be admitted to the hospital at all. Other babies may go into the hospital with RSV infection but have a milder form of the infection than if they hadn't received *Synagis*. The most important way to protect your baby from infection is to have anyone who is going to hold your baby wash their hands and to avoid exposure to any children and adults who have symptoms of a cough, cold or flu.

How quickly does *Synagis* provide protection from infection?

Most babies achieve good levels of protection within 2 days after receiving their first injection.

What are the risks involved with *Synagis*?

Like every drug, *Synagis* has certain risks. The site in the skin where the drug is injected may become red, or develop swelling or soreness. This usually lasts only a short time and is not serious. *Synagis* is not made from actual viruses or human blood products. Also, special purification processes are used to ensure that *Synagis* is free from viral contamination.

Where can my baby get the *Synagis* injections?

If your baby goes home from the NICU during the winter RSV season, we can give the first dose of *Synagis* here before discharge. After your baby is discharged from the NICU, you may be able to receive *Synagis* in your pediatrician's office. If this is not possible, several hospitals have set up special clinics where babies can receive *Synagis*.

What is the cost of *Synagis*? Will my insurance pay for *Synagis*?

The cost of *Synagis* is close to \$1,000 per dose. Each insurance company has its own specific guidelines for coverage for *Synagis*, but almost all should cover this treatment provided that your baby's current status meets the recommendations for receiving the drug. If your baby doesn't clearly meet the criteria but you are still interested in obtaining this treatment for your baby, you may still be able to obtain coverage. You should discuss potential treatment with your pediatrician and then talk to your insurance company to get pre-approval of *Synagis* treatment.

Will my baby need *Synagis* every winter?

No. The first winter is when most premature infants are in danger of getting severe RSV infections. A few infants will receive *Synagis* during their second winter season, if they still have severe breathing problems due to their prematurity. *Synagis* is not recommended at this time for children who are older than 2 years of age.

Will *Synagis* interfere with my baby's other immunizations?

No. *Synagis* is not expected to interfere with routine childhood vaccines.

Where can I get more information?

Please feel free to ask questions of any neonatal care provider in the Beth Israel Deaconess NICU. We also encourage you to discuss *Synagis* therapy with your pediatric care provider.