

Bronchiolitis in children

Information for parents and/or caregivers

What is Bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis is a common chest infection in young children. Bronchiolitis affects the bronchioles, the smallest airways in the lungs. It is usually caused by the Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) but can be caused by influenza viruses, rhinoviruses, adenoviruses and other viruses.

- It usually occurs in babies under 12 months, but sometimes up to 18 months of age. Young babies can become seriously ill with the infection.
- Those most likely to need support through this illness are children under the age of 12 months, immunocompromised children, extremely premature babies, or children who have an underlying heart condition.

How can I tell if my child has bronchiolitis?

- The infection causes the linings of the airways to swell, narrowing the airways, and causing breathing difficulties, wheezing and coughing.

The first symptoms your child may have are the same as a common cold. These symptoms last 1-2 days

- Runny nose
- Mild cough
- Snuffly nose

These symptoms are followed by an increase in problems related to breathing, such as:

- Fast breathing
- Poor feeding
- Noisy breathing (wheezing)
- Drawing in of the chest with each breath (ribs move in and out more than usual)
- Nasal flaring
- Fever

Babies with bronchiolitis are usually worst on the second or third day of illness and are often unwell for 4-9 days. Their cough may continue for 2-4 weeks.

How is bronchiolitis treated?

Antibiotics are not given because bronchiolitis is caused by a virus.

Give smaller amounts of fluid more often. This helps to prevent babies getting too tired when feeding. Giving smaller amounts of fluid more often also prevents dehydration.

- Babies need to rest.
- Smaller amounts of fluid but more often.
- Breast - or formula feed more frequently.

Care at home

- Give shorter breast feeds /formula/water more often
- Avoid contact with other babies or children in the first few days, as bronchiolitis is an infectious disease.
- Ensure a smoke free environment. This is especially important around babies with any respiratory illness.

Coming to Hospital

If your baby is distressed and having trouble feeding, they may need to be admitted to hospital for staff to:

- Observe your child
- Give extra oxygen if needed
- Give extra fluids through a drip into a vein (intravenous therapy) or via a nasogastric tube into the stomach if needed.

Will my child need any other tests?

Tests could include:

- Throat or nasal swab
- Chest X/ Ray

These are not always necessary.

Follow up

Go to the nearest doctor or hospital if your child:

- Has difficulty in breathing (very fast or not regular breaths)
- Cannot feed normally because of coughing or wheezing
- Fewer wet nappies than usual
- Is changing colour in the face when they cough
- Turns blue or has skin that is pale and sweaty

Make an appointment for your child to see a doctor if:

- Your child's cough is getting worse
- They have less than half of their normal feeds or are refusing food or drinks
- They seem very tired or are more sleepy than usual
- You are worried in any way

Discharge

- Your child will be reviewed by the doctor before discharge from hospital.
- If your doctor would like you to follow up with your GP, this will be up to you to arrange.

Will it happen again?

It is possible to have bronchiolitis again, but most babies will only have it once. Wheezing may occur again with other viral infections. If a wheeze occurs often you should consult your doctor for further assessment.

For more information

- See your family doctor
- For 24 hour health advice call - Healthdirect Australia 1800 022 222
- Parent Helpline 1300 364 100
- Local emergency department

**In an emergency situation,
please dial 000 for an ambulance.**

Adapted from:

Bronchiolitis: Clinical Guideline, SA Child health Network

Bronchiolitis (wheezing Babies): Women's and children's health network: Parenting and Child health

Bronchiolitis in children: health information for kids, Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne.

Bronchiolitis: Parent factsheet, The Children's hospital at Westmead, The Sydney Children's Hospital Networks.

For more information

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