

Bronchiolitis

What is Bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis is a common chest infection which affects babies and young children. The tiny passages in the lungs become swollen which can lead to difficulty in breathing. Bronchiolitis is caused by viruses, most commonly RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus).

- Common in children under 1 year of age, but can affect older children
- It occurs seasonally, usually between October to March
- RSV can be easily spread to other young children by close contact and coughing. Therefore, it is important to wash your hands after contact and dispose of tissues carefully

Signs & Symptoms

Bronchiolitis starts with symptoms of the common cold.

- Snuffly, runny nose
- Slight temperature for 2-3 days
- Persistent Cough

This may be followed after 2-3 days by increasing breathing difficulties & poor feeding

- Breathing faster than normal
- Wheezing and noisy breathing
- Sucking in between the ribs & using tummy muscles
- Tiredness and sleeping more
- Difficulty feeding, feeding less than normal, not interested in feeding, too breathless to feed

How long does Bronchiolitis last?

- Children are usually unwell for 3-5 days, and recover over the next 7-10 days
- The cough can continue for several weeks
- Your child can go back to nursery once they are well enough (feeding normally and have no breathing difficulties)

Treatment of Bronchiolitis

There are no medicines that are effective in treating bronchiolitis. Antibiotics do not work because it is a virus. Some babies need to stay in hospital to be monitored.

- If your child is struggling with their breathing and has low oxygen levels we can give them oxygen to help them
- If they are struggling with feeding we may give them smaller, more frequent feeds, or feed them via a nasogastric tube. Some small babies need fluids into a vein
- Very occasionally children need specialised care to assist their breathing
- To confirm the cause of bronchiolitis some mucus may be taken from your child's nose

Care at Home

- RSV is very infectious and also causes coughs and colds in older children
- To reduce the spread of infection wash hands regularly following contact and dispose of tissues and objects that may contain infectious secretions
- Avoid smoky environments as this will make your child's breathing worse. Do not smoke in the home or near your child
- If feeding is difficult try giving smaller amounts of fluids more often, or more frequent breast feeds
- If your child has a temperature you can give them paracetamol

Will It Happen Again?

Your baby is unlikely to get bronchiolitis again, although occasionally this can happen

Seeking Help

If you are concerned about your child then you must seek help.

- Contact your GP if:
 - Your child is struggling to take their feeds
 - The cough is getting worse, or breathing worsening
- Call 999 if:
 - Your child is struggling with his/her breathing
 - They are pale and sweaty
 - Your baby's tongue and lips are turning blue
 - They are having long pauses in their breathing

Key Points

- Bronchiolitis is very common viral infection in young children
- It is very infectious
- Babies need to rest and feed small amounts more often
- Your baby may still have a cough and be wheezy for some time, but this will gradually settle
- Smoking in the home increases the risk of bronchiolitis and its severity

Contact numbers

For further advice about your child's condition contact:

- Your GP or Practice Nurse
- NHS Direct 0845 46 47

References

- Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network: Guideline 91 Bronchiolitis.
- The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne: Bronchiolitis
- The Sydney Children's Hospital Network
- PLoS ONE 2011: Household tobacco smoke & admission weight predict severe bronchiolitis in infants; Semple MG et al