

Bronchiolitis

Bronchiolitis is an infection causing inflammation in the small airways of the lungs. It is common in young children. It starts as a cold then gets worse and leads to a buildup of mucus. This can make it hard to breathe and cause coughing and wheezing. It is usually caused by a virus. In most children, bronchiolitis goes away on its own but some children will need to be seen by a doctor. Symptoms can last up to 2 to 3 weeks.

What are the symptoms of bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis usually begins like a regular cold that starts with:

- Stuffy or runny nose
- Mild cough
- Fever (temperature higher than 100.4°F or 38°C)
- Decreased appetite

As bronchiolitis progresses, other symptoms can start, including:

- Breathing faster than normal
- Pauses between breaths – sometimes a pause can last more than 15-20 seconds
- Wheezing – this is a whistling sound when breathing. It usually lasts up to 7 days
- A severe cough – The cough can last for 14 days or longer
- Trouble eating and drinking – In babies, a stuffy nose or fast breathing can make it harder to breast or bottle feed. Some babies and young children will cough hard enough that they vomit

Steps to Take - Care at Home

Keep your child away from cigarette, cigar, marijuana or vape smoke. Ban smoking from the house and around your child. If you cannot do this, do not allow smoking in rooms where your child spends time. Do not smoke in the car with your child, even if the window is open.

Limit the use of certain cleaners or perfumes. They can bother your child. Symptoms may worsen over the first week. To help ease breathing:

- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about saline nasal drops.

- Use a bulb syringe to clear your child's nose. Try this before feeding.
- Try slightly lifting the head of the bed, crib, or crib mattress. This may help your child sleep better. Do not put pillows, rolls, boosters, or other extra material in a crib.

What to Eat

To help your child get enough food and fluids:

- For breastfed infants, encourage frequent short breast feeds.
- Encourage clear fluids during the day.
- Offer smaller, more frequent meals and snacks instead of larger ones.

Activity

Have your child rest as needed.

- Your child can go back to daycare or school when their fever has resolved, they are breathing normally and other symptoms have improved. If you are not sure, check with your doctor.

Medications

You can give medicine for pain or fever, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol, Tempra) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin). Be sure to read the instructions carefully.

DO NOT give your child medicines that quiet a cough. These usually do not work well and can have serious side effects in children. Cough and cold medicine are NOT recommended for children under 6.

Bronchiolitis is caused by a virus. Antibiotics do not treat viruses so they will not be given by the doctor.

Note: Aspirin is not advised for children with a current or recent viral infection. Check with your doctor before giving your child aspirin or other medicines.

When giving medicine:

- Give your child the medicine as advised. Do not change the amount or schedule.
- Use the measuring device that came with the medicine. If you need to use a spoon, cup, or syringe, make sure it has the units that match your child's prescription.
 - For example, if the medicine is given in milliliters (mL), the device should have mL on it.

- Be aware of the side effects of your child's medicine. Let the doctor know if any happen.
- Talk to your child's doctor before stopping any prescription medicine.
- Do not share your child's prescription medicine.
- Medicine can be harmful when mixed. Talk to your child's doctor or pharmacist if your child is taking more than one, including over the counter products and supplements.

Problems to Look Out For

Call or see your primary care provider if your child is not getting better or:

- Shows signs of problems breathing such as:
 - Widening of nostrils and squeezing of belly when trying to breathe in
 - High-pitched whistling/wheezing sound when breathing out
 - Grunting and tightening of belly muscles with breathing
 - The skin and muscles between your child's ribs or below your child's ribcage look like they are caving in
 - Problems drinking because of trouble sucking or swallowing
 - Being less alert or unable to talk
- Shows signs of dehydration such as:
 - Crying without tears
 - Decreased urination or fewer wet diapers
 - Dry mouth
- Your baby is younger than 3 months and has a fever
- Your baby is older than 3 months and has a fever for more than 3 days

Call for medical help (911) or go to the emergency room right away if any of the following occur:

- A great deal of wheezing or severe problems breathing or stops breathing
- Frequent pauses in breathing or pauses with a change in skin colour (pale/blue/gray skin colour)
- Starts grunting
- Skin with a bluish tint—lips and fingertips are often first sites to change color
- More sleepiness than normal
- Less than 4 wet diapers in 24 hours
- Vomiting with feeding attempts or if your baby/child is unable to feed
- Your infant under 1 month has a fever

If you think your child has an emergency, call for medical help right away.

How did my child get bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis is caused by viruses, including RSV, which spread easily from person to person. The viruses live in the droplets that go into the air when a sick person coughs or sneezes. A person can spread these virus droplets before they are showing signs of infection.

Can bronchiolitis be prevented?

There are ways to reduce your child's chances of getting sick with viruses that cause bronchiolitis.

You can help prevent infections from spreading if you:

- Wash your hands and your child's hands often with soap and water, or use an alcohol based hand sanitizer (do not use on infants who frequently place hands in mouth).
- Teach older children to cover their mouth when they cough.
- Do not share glasses, cups, utensils.
- Clean things that are touched a lot, such as counters, sinks, faucets, doorknobs, phones, remotes and light switches as well as infant toys and soothers.
- Stay away from people who are sick.
- If you cannot avoid people who are sick, wear a medical grade mask. When an adult or older child is sick, they should wear a mask if they are around infants and young children.
- Make sure that your child gets all of the recommended vaccines, including those for influenza and COVID-19.

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