

# Bronchiolitis in Children

## Parent and Carer Information Leaflet- Child Health



### Options available

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**01253 955588**

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# Bronchiolitis

## What is Bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis is a viral infection which affects the smallest air passages (Bronchioles) of the lungs causing them to become narrowed by inflammation and secretions (discharge). The virus which causes bronchiolitis is the Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV). It is a seasonal virus, occurring commonly in the winter months (October - March).

## Who gets Bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis occurs in babies under 12 months old. Older children and adults may be affected with the same virus but they have larger air passages and can therefore deal with the infection better, causing only a cold.

## What are symptoms of Bronchiolitis?

- **Cold symptoms:** a runny nose, cough and mild fever are usual for the first 2-3 days.
- **Fast breathing, difficulty with breathing and wheezing** may develop as the infection travels down to the bronchioles. The number of breaths per minute may go as high as 60-80.
- The **nostrils may flare** (open out) and the cough becomes worse. You can often **see the muscles between the ribs moving inwards** during each breath. This is because the baby needs more effort to breathe than normal.
- The baby may have **difficulty feeding** and taking drinks. This is because the baby is ill and becomes tired easily. The baby may struggle to breathe and to feed at the same time.

The wheezing sound, if present, usually lasts for two to three days. As the wheezing settles, the baby gradually improves. However, the cough may last up to a month.

# Bronchiolitis

## Treatment

Bronchiolitis is a self-limiting illness. This means it will normally go as the immune system clears the virus. Because it is a viral illness there is no medicine that will 'cure' it and antibiotics will not help.

Sometimes, other medication such as Salbutamol and Atrovent inhalers may be prescribed to open up the airways and settle the wheezing, but these may not be effective in babies under 12 months of age.

- Give your child small frequent feeds- this will help to prevent dehydration.
- Sit your child upright when feeding- this will support your child's breathing difficulties.
- Breathing may be easier for your baby if he or she sleeps with the head of the cot slightly raised.
- Give your baby infant paracetamol or ibuprofen, but only if he is three months or older. Check the dosage information on the packet, or ask your doctor or pharmacist if you're unsure about how much to give your baby. Paracetamol or ibuprofen will help to bring down your baby's fever and relieve his/her sore throat, which may help baby to feed more easily.
- You can also try nasal saline drops, which may help to unblock his or her nose. You can buy these from your pharmacy. Apply the drops to each of baby's nostrils 15 minutes before a feed.

# **Bronchiolitis**

## **When to see your Doctor**

### **Worsening cough and wheeze**

If your baby's breathing becomes more difficult, or your child looks tired and listless, is not sleeping or if there is any blueness around the lips, seek help immediately. Some babies do need to be admitted to hospital for support such as oxygen and fluids. The cough may last for several weeks. If your child is otherwise well and feeding then, although this cough sounds unpleasant and irritating, it is normal. Do not give your baby any over-the-counter cough and cold medicines. They should not be given to children under six, because of the risk of side-effects.

### **Poor fluid intake**

An easy way to tell if your child is not taking enough fluids is to check their nappies. If there are fewer wet nappies than usual, it probably means that your child is not getting enough fluid. If he/she is refusing to feed, having difficulty feeding or fewer wet nappies consult your doctor.

Bronchiolitis is highly infectious and can be easily spread to other babies, children and persons either directly or from objects contaminated with the virus. It is important to wash your hands frequently and insist anyone holding your baby has clean hands. Keep your baby away from anyone with a cold, and steer clear of crowds.

### **Smoking**

It is important that no one smokes in the house or around your child, as smoke will affect your child's breathing.





## Useful contact details

### Children's Ward

01253 953437 (Open 24 Hours)

### Children's Assessment Unit

01253 953778 (Open Mon-Fri 08.00- 22.00, Sat-Sun 10.00-22.30)

Website: [www.bfwh.nhs.uk/childrens](http://www.bfwh.nhs.uk/childrens)

Hospital Switchboard: **01253 300000**

## Patient Relations Department

The Patient Relations Department offer impartial advice and deal with any concerns or complaints the Trust receives. You can contact them via:

Tel: **01253 955589**

email: [patient.relations@bfwh.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.relations@bfwh.nhs.uk)

You can also write to us at:

**Patient Relations Department, Blackpool Victoria Hospital,  
Whinney Heys Road, Blackpool FY3 8NR**

Further information is available on our website: [www.bfwh.nhs.uk](http://www.bfwh.nhs.uk)

## References

This leaflet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this leaflet are available on request from: **Procedural Document and Leaflet Coordinator 01253 953397**

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