

Caring for Your Child's Lung Infection (BRONCHIOLITIS)



Emergency Department

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What is Bronchiolitis?

It is a cold virus (often Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)) that has gone down into your child's lungs. Your child's body will over-react to the infection. This will cause swelling in your child's nose and small airways of the lungs, known as the 'bronchioles'. The name bronchiolitis comes from: "over-reaction of the bronchioles".

- ▶ Your child may have a fever for the first few days.
- ▶ Your child will have a stuffy nose, tight breathing and little energy. The tight breathing may worsen over the first 6-7 days, then gradually improve.
- ▶ Your child will cough (often to the point of throwing-up), wheeze, and breathe quickly.
- ▶ Your child may cough for 1-2 weeks or longer.

Bronchiolitis is hard on children, especially small babies who have trouble eating and sleeping. Bronchiolitis is also hard on caregivers. There isn't a medicine that will make your child's bronchiolitis go away and coughing can last up to a month. The whole family may lose sleep.

What should I do?

- ▶ Try little drinks often so your child does not become dehydrated. If your child throws up when coughing, wait for the coughing to stop then try a small feed/drink again.
- ▶ Check in regularly with your family doctor who knows your baby well and can help judge if things are better or worse.
- ▶ Be patient. Only time makes it go away.
- ▶ Do not allow smoking around your child or inside your home. Smoke will make your child's coughing and wheezing worse.

Is there a treatment for Bronchiolitis?

We know of no medicine that will kill the virus or make the bronchiolitis go away.

- ▶ Cough medicines do not help.
- ▶ Antibiotics will not help and may make your child sicker.

A few children with bronchiolitis can breathe more easily and thus drink more easily when given asthma medicines. If your child is very sick or the cough lasts longer than 3 weeks, your doctor may decide to try:

- ▶ inhaled medicines (such as those used to treat asthma) that work to relax 'over-reacting' airways and/or calm 'over-reacting' airways may help
- ▶ oral medicines that calm 'over-reacting' airways (steroids) may also be tried.



See your family doctor if:

- ▶ Your child is unable to sleep because of the wheezing.
- ▶ You think your child is not drinking enough fluids.
- ▶ Your child is pulling at his/her ear and you think your child has an ear infection. Antibiotics may be used to treat the ear infection.
- ▶ Your child has coughed for several days and then suddenly develops a high fever. Your child may have developed bacterial pneumonia. A chest x-ray will confirm whether or not your child has bacterial pneumonia. Antibiotics can be used to treat this secondary infection.
- ▶ Your child develops a fever that lasts more than 72 hours.



Bring your child back to the Emergency if:

- Your child breathes very fast or has retractions (tugging in between the ribs)
- Your child drinks less than half of his normal amount for more than 24 hours.
- Your child stops breathing (for more than 15 seconds) or his/her lips become blue
- Your child starts to look very sick.

It's good to ask!

Developed by the professionals of the BC Children's Hospital Emergency Department with assistance from the Learning & Development Department.