

## **Bronchiolitis**

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### **What is bronchiolitis?**

Bronchiolitis is an inflammation of the smaller airways in your child's lungs. It can be caused by many viruses, the most common being Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV). It is most common in children under the age of 2.

### **How is bronchiolitis diagnosed?**

Bronchiolitis is usually diagnosed by the clinical exam and symptoms. Sometimes, your doctor may do a special test for certain viruses that cause bronchiolitis. This usually involves a swab or washing inside your child's nose. It is not always necessary to identify the virus that is causing the illness.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Your child will usually develop a runny nose, dry cough, and fever. Your child may also wheeze. Wheezing is a high pitched noise made when trying to breathe through inflamed air tubes. Sometimes, wheezing is only heard by using a stethoscope, but when it is severe, it can be heard without any help.

### **What are signs that my child is having trouble breathing?**

When trying to breathe through inflamed airways, a child may show outward signs of distress. The child's nostrils may flare with each breath. The child may use extra muscles to help breathe; these muscles can be in the neck, between the ribs, or under the ribs. When the child takes a breath in, usually you see the chest expanding. When the child is working too hard to breathe, you may actually see the chest or the extra muscles "sucking in" with each breath. Also, your child's rate of breathing may increase.

### **How do we treat bronchiolitis?**

Since bronchiolitis is caused by a virus, there is no "magic cure". The body will fight off the virus on its own. Helping clear out nasal congestion can help. If you have an infant, you can bulb suction the nose, even with some saline nasal drops to loosen the mucus. You can also take your infant or older child into the bathroom and run the hot shower while you sit with the child on your lap (not under the shower). Warm mist often helps to loosen congestion. A humidifier in the child's room may also help.

Sometimes, children require extra oxygen to help them breathe more easily while the body fights the infection. If this is the case, the child will stay in the hospital until he or she no longer needs oxygen. Sometimes, nebulizers (breathing treatments) may help. A common medication used is albuterol. This does not cure bronchiolitis, but in some children it may help the airways open up. Your doctor will decide if nebulizers are right for your child.

### **What if my child has wheezed before?**

A child who has wheezed before will be more likely to wheeze again if he or she gets bronchiolitis. If your child is already on nebulizers, your doctor can explain to you how often you can give the breathing treatments to try to prevent the wheezing.

**How can I prevent bronchiolitis?**

If you have a premature infant, or a child with a history of heart or lung disease, ask your doctor if your child qualifies for one of the medications that can help to lessen the severity of an RSV-associated bronchiolitis.

**Is bronchiolitis contagious?**

Yes, since viruses are the cause, bronchiolitis can be contagious. However, everybody reacts to viruses in different ways. For example, RSV in a 1 year old boy may cause bronchiolitis, in his 5 year old brother it may cause a bad cold, and in his mother it may cause a mild runny nose. As we get older, we are less likely to have wheezing or airway problems from these viruses, and are more likely just to get the common cold. However, older children and adults with asthma will always be at greater risk for breathing difficulties when faced with these viruses.

**When should I take my child to the doctor?**

If your child is showing any signs of respiratory distress, like breathing rapidly (more than 40 times a minute), flaring the nostrils, making grunting noises with each breath, or pulling in on the extra muscles while breathing in, you should take your child to the doctor. Also, if your child has a high temperature, is lethargic, is not eating or drinking like usual, or just “doesn’t seem right”, you should take the child to be seen.

**Further resources:**

1. [www.familydoctor.org](http://www.familydoctor.org); keyword: bronchiolitis
2. <http://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/health/info/chest/diagnose/rsv.htm>