

PATIENT INFORMATION

Bronchiolitis

: Information for parents / carers

What is Bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis is an illness where the tiniest air passages in your baby's lungs become swollen. This can make it more difficult for your baby to breathe. Usually, bronchiolitis is caused by a virus called Respiratory Syncytial Virus (known as RSV).

Almost all children will have had an infection caused by RSV by the time they are two. It is most common in the winter months and usually only causes mild 'cold-like' symptoms. Most children get better on their own.

Some babies, especially very young ones, can have difficulty in breathing or feeding and may need hospital treatment.

Can I prevent bronchiolitis?

No. The virus that causes bronchiolitis in babies also causes coughs and colds in older children and adults, so it is very difficult to prevent. Washing your hands before and after handling your baby may reduce the spread of the virus.

What are the symptoms?

- Bronchiolitis starts like a simple cold. Your baby may have a runny nose and sometimes a temperature and a cough.
- After a few days, your baby's cough may become worse.
- Your baby's breathing may be faster than normal and it may become noisy. He or she may need to make more effort to breathe.
- Sometimes, bronchiolitis may cause very young babies to have brief pauses in their breathing.
- As breathing becomes more difficult, your baby may not be able to take the usual amount of milk by breast or bottle. You may notice fewer wet nappies than usual.

- Your baby may be sick after feeding and become irritable.

How can I help my baby?

- If feeding is difficult, try breastfeeding more often or offering smaller bottle feeds more often.
- If your baby has a temperature, you can give him or her Paracetamol. You must follow the instructions carefully that come with the Paracetamol or from the pharmacist.
- If your baby is already taking any medicines or inhalers, you should carry on using these.
- Bronchiolitis is caused by a virus so antibiotics won't help.

How long does bronchiolitis last?

- Most babies with bronchiolitis get better within about two weeks. They may still have a cough for a few more weeks.
- Your baby can go back to nursery or day care as soon as he or she is well enough. They should be feeding normally and have no difficulties breathing.
- There is usually no need to see your doctor if your baby is recovering well. If you are worried about your baby's progress, discuss this with your doctor or health visitor.

When should I get advice?

- If you are worried about your baby.
- If your baby is having difficulty in breathing.
- If your baby is taking less than half of their usual feeds over 2 – 3 feeds or has not had a wet nappy for 12 hours.
- If your baby has a high temperature.
- If your baby seems very tired or irritable.

In Hospital

- In hospital, your baby's breathing will be checked using a machine called a pulse oximeter. This is a light probe which will usually be wrapped around your baby's foot or toe. It measures the oxygen in your baby's blood and helps doctors and nurses to assess your baby's breathing.
- If your baby needs oxygen, it will be given through fine tubes into the nose or through a mask.
- If your baby needs help with feeding, he or she may be given milk through a feeding tube. This is a small plastic tube passed through your baby's nose or mouth and down into their stomach.
- You will be able to stay with your baby while he or she is in hospital.
- A few babies become seriously ill and may need to go into intensive care (perhaps in a different hospital) for specialist help with their breathing.
- You will be able to take your baby home when he or she is able to feed and doesn't need oxygen any more

Ring 999 for an ambulance if;

Your baby is having a lot of difficulty breathing and is pale or sweaty

Your baby's tongue and lips are turning blue.

There are long pauses in your baby's breathing

For more information contact:

Short Stay Paediatric Assessment Unit

Telephone: 01803 655492

8.30am to 9.00pm

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.