

Bronchiolitis

What is it?

Bronchiolitis is a flu like illness that affects infants in their first year of life. It is caused by one of several viruses (the most common one being RSV or Respiratory Syncytial Virus), that affect the small airways (bronchioles) in the lungs. Bronchiolitis occurs more frequently in the winter months.

Bronchiolitis starts as a simple cold (runny nose, sneezing and cough), and may progress with symptoms such as breathing difficulties (fast, laboured or noisy) and feeding difficulties (reduced amounts, frequency or interest in feeds).

Diagnosis

There is no special test to confirm the diagnosis. However, nasal secretions may be sent to the laboratory to confirm what type of virus your child has. The type of virus does not change the treatment of bronchiolitis.

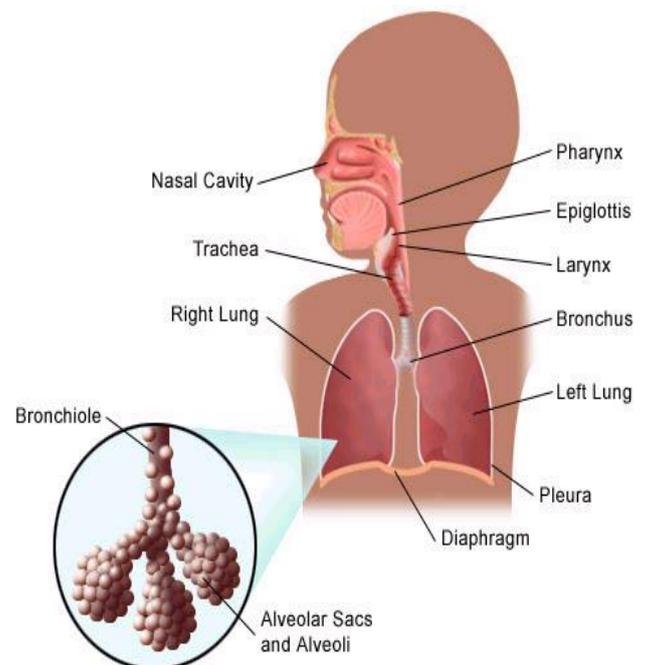
Home management

Always try not to smoke in the home or around your baby. This is especially important around babies with any respiratory illness.

- Medicines do not usually help babies with bronchiolitis. Antibiotics are not given because bronchiolitis is caused by a virus and antibiotics do not cure viruses.
- Encourage rest.
- Give shorter breast feeds or formula, and water more frequently. This way your child does not get too tired when feeding. If your child does not drink enough they can get dehydrated.
- You can give paracetamol if your child is irritable.
- Avoid contact with other babies in the first few days, as bronchiolitis is an infectious disease and contact with other babies or infants may make them sick too.

If your baby is distressed and having trouble feeding, they may need to be admitted to hospital. Staff may need to:

- Give them oxygen.



- Give them fluids with a feeding tube through the nose into the stomach, or sometimes through a drip into a vein.
- Watch them closely to ensure they do not become more unwell.

Follow-up

Make an appointment for your child to see a doctor (or return to the emergency department) if they have any of the following:

- Difficulty breathing (fast or irregular breathing, skin around the neck and ribs sucking in, head bobbing, grunting noise).
- Turns blue or has skin that is pale and sweaty.
- Taking less than half their normal feeds, or are refusing food or fluids.
- Seem very tired or are more sleepy than usual.
- If you are worried about your child for another reason.

Key points to remember

Some babies are more at risk from bronchiolitis. Get your baby seen at the nearest emergency department if they have any of the below:

- Were born premature (born before 23 weeks).
- Very young (less than 10 weeks since birth).
- Have chronic health conditions (e.g. lung disease, heart disease, neurological disease, or are immunocompromised).
- Are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- Babies need to rest and drink small amounts more often.
- Bronchiolitis is an infectious disease in the first few days of illness.
- It is more common in babies under 6 months old.
- Babies are usually sick for 3 – 5 days and then recover over the next 7 – 10 days. The cough may continue for 2 – 4 weeks.
- Smoking in the home increases the chance of babies having bronchiolitis and makes it worse.
- Saline nasal drops or sprays (from a pharmacy) can help to clear the nasal passages.



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Child and Adolescent Health Service



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