

Fact Sheet

Bronchiolitis



Bronchiolitis is a chest infection caused by a virus - most commonly respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). It often occurs in babies during the first year of life and it usually happens in winter. The virus infects the small breathing tubes (bronchioles) of the lungs, this causes them to become narrowed by mucous and inflammation.

Generally, the baby first develops symptoms of a cold, such as a runny nose, a cough and fever. Over the next day or so, the coughing becomes worse and there may be a wheezing sound heard when the baby breathes out, sometimes the baby finds it hard to breathe. These babies may look as if they have asthma, and may also have difficulty with feeding and sleeping.

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.

Home management

Because this is a viral infection there is no medicine that will "cure" it and antibiotics will not help. Sometimes, other medication such as Ventolin™ or Bricanyl™ 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.

Your baby will need extra fluids. Give an extra bottle or two per day, and give more frequent breastfeeds. Feeding may be difficult, so try offering smaller feeds more often.

When to see your doctor

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.

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.

Most babies with bronchiolitis can be managed at home, and they get better within a week to ten days.

Will it happen again?

Maybe. It is possible to have bronchiolitis again, but most babies will only have it once. Wheezing may occur again with other viral infections or your child may develop asthma. If a wheeze occurs recurrently you should consult your doctor as a different treatment may be needed.

Does it cause future problems?

Some children who have symptoms of bronchiolitis may eventually develop asthma. Doctors are not sure whether the virus causes asthma or whether it simply uncovers an inherited tendency to develop asthma.

Remember

- **Bronchiolitis gets better in a week to ten days.**
- **It is a viral infection, so medications may not help.**
- **Your child often needs extra fluid. Offer small frequent feeds or frequent breast feeds.**
- **Consult your doctor if your child has difficulty with breathing, feeding or sleeping.**
- **Some children develop asthma after having bronchiolitis.**

This fact sheet is for education purposes only.
Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for your child.

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