

Bronchiolitis Parent Information

Definition:

Bronchiolitis is a lung infection caused by a virus. It is typically seen during winter months and is most common in infants and young children under 2 years of age. It can cause the following symptoms:

- Wheezing: high-pitched whistle sound when breathing out
- Retractions: trouble getting air in and out of lungs causing the skin to pull in between ribs when breathing

[Retractions: Video](#) [Wheezing: sound clip](#)



- More rapid breathing: seen when you watch your child's chest rise and fall (more rapid breathing can also be common when there is fever)
- Cough, runny nose, and nasal congestion
- Fever

Cause

Bronchiolitis is caused by different viruses and those viruses are passed from person to person through sneezing and nasal secretions. RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) is one of many viruses that can cause bronchiolitis. The reason you hear most about this virus is because it can, but does not always, make respiratory symptoms more severe. Infants who get sick with RSV develop bronchiolitis, but older kids, with the same virus, only develop cold symptoms.

How long will symptoms last?

Wheezing and tight breathing may be present 7 days, and typically after 3 days, symptoms begin to improve, unless the virus causing bronchiolitis is RSV when symptoms may worsen between days 3-5. The cough is often present for 2 weeks or longer. Fever may last up to 3 days.

Feeding

It is not uncommon for the infant or child to eat and drink less than usual when sick with bronchiolitis. Often eating and drinking is more tiring than when well. Also, the nasal secretions may drain down the throat and enter the stomach, causing decreased appetite and possibly looser stools. You may also see some vomiting of mucus. The key is to offer liquids often, in smaller amounts. Breast milk (infants) and cow's milk (1 year and older) can still be given.

When to go back to school

They should stay out of school until fever has been absent x 24 hours and runny nose is gone.

Helpful treatments and tips

Because bronchiolitis is caused by a virus, there are no antibiotics that help with this infection. The best treatments help symptoms while we wait for the body to fight off the infection. Treatments for symptoms include:

- For wheezing: a small group of children may benefit from inhaled albuterol (a medicine used for those with asthma). If your child is prescribed albuterol, this does not necessarily mean that they have asthma.
- For cough, runny nose, and congestion:
 - Warm fluids can help decrease stickiness of mucus in throat that causes cough. Offer warm apple juice or lemonade to those over 4 months old.
 - Honey (for those over 1 year) can help with cough.
 - Breathing humidified air (humidifier or steamy shower) helps with cough and congestion.
 - Saline nose drops and nasal suction (3 drops in each nostril, wait 1 minute, suction, repeat as needed) helps with nasal congestion.
- For fever: Fever reducers like Ibuprofen every 6 hours or acetaminophen every 4 hours can be helpful. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends not treating fever unless it is over 102°; however, if your child feels miserable, even with a lower temperature, these medications can be helpful. Remember, fever reducers often only lower temperature 1°-2°, so, they may not bring temperature all the way back to normal range. Though fever can be unpleasant, it shows that the child's body is working well to fight infection.
- Sleep close by so that you can easily detect trouble breathing
- Make sure to keep the child away from smoke which can worsen symptoms

When to call

- Anytime you are worried or concerned, especially if breathing becomes labored or difficult
- Signs of fast breathing (breathing faster than 60 breaths a minute when not crying)
- Your child begins acting very sick
- If there are signs of an ear infection (ear pain, crying when lying down, decreased sleep, fussiness, fever)
- Signs of dehydration (less than 4 wet diapers/day, no tears with crying, dry mouth)
- If there are signs of a new infection (fever returns after being gone for over 24 hours)
- Temperature over 100.3 for infants 3 months and younger