

Bronchiolitis in Babies

Child Health Information

Bronchiolitis is a chest illness caused by a virus which makes the tiny air passages in your baby's lungs become inflamed. This makes it more difficult for babies to breathe and feed normally. It is most commonly caused by a virus called respiratory syncytial virus or RSV.



Most babies with bronchiolitis will get better on their own, but sometimes we have to support their feeding and breathing in hospital.

Older children and adults who catch RSV usually only get a runny nose and mild cold-like illness.

What are the symptoms?

- A runny nose
- A cough which may get worse after a few days
- Breathing faster and more noisily than usual.
- Drawing in of the muscles around their ribs ('recession').
- Not being able to take the usual amount of milk.
- Fewer wet nappies than normal.

How can you help?

- Keep a close eye on your baby; seek advice if you are worried.
- Offer smaller, more frequent feeds.
- If your baby has a temperature, you can give them paracetamol (eg Calpol[®]). Make sure you read the instruction label carefully.
- **Keep your baby away from tobacco smoke:** Passive smoking is very bad for your baby and makes breathing problems worse.
- Wash your hands to prevent spreading the virus.
- Bronchiolitis is caused by a virus so antibiotics don't help.

When to seek medical advice

- If your baby is finding it difficult to breathe normally.
- If your baby looks very pale or blue.
- If your baby is taking less than 2/3 of their usual amount of feed or is having dry nappies.
- OR If you are worried about your baby.

If at any time you are very concerned about your baby call 111 for advice or 999 for an ambulance.

What happens if your baby has to stay in hospital?

- You will be able to stay with your baby.
- To confirm the cause of bronchiolitis, we will usually test the mucus in baby's nose for RSV.
- We will do regular measurements of breathing and heart rate.
- Sometimes we need to give some oxygen to your baby, this is usually using a transparent headbox which your baby sleeps in or by fine tubes that go into the nose.
- If babies are unable to take the amount of feed that they need we will pass a soft plastic tube into the stomach so we can feed your baby.
- Some babies need to have fluid through a drip as sometimes a tummy full of milk makes it harder to breath.
- Some babies need extra help with their breathing from a machine called CPAP or a high flow device which keeps the airways open and makes it easier for babies to breath.
- A very small number of babies become seriously unwell with bronchiolitis and need to be transferred a paediatric intensive care unit.

If my baby is admitted how long will the hospital stay be?

Your baby will be able to go home as soon as they no longer need help with their feeding and breathing. This is usually two to three days but particularly in very young babies it can be longer, sometimes more than a week.

Are there long term effects?

- Babies are usually much better within two weeks. Many babies will have a cough for a few weeks after that but then make a full recovery. Babies who have had bronchiolitis may be more likely to get wheezy with colds in future.
- Your baby can go back to nursery or day care as soon as they seem better (they are feeding well and their breathing is normal).
- Babies do not normally need a check-up appointment after bronchiolitis but contact your GP if you are concerned about their progress.
- It is very important to avoid tobacco smoke to help your baby get better.

Further information

Your GP, hospital doctor, or health visitor will be happy to give further advice.
NHS choices website: <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Bronchiolitis/>