

Children's Emergency Department

Bronchiolitis: Parent/Carer discharge information



Bronchiolitis is a viral chest infection that is common in babies in their first year of life, particularly in babies under six months of age. While most cases are mild, it can be serious in very young babies. It usually occurs in winter.

Bronchiolitis is caused by viruses that infect the small airways of the lungs, which cause them to become blocked with sticky mucus. It starts as a common cold, giving your baby a runny nose, red eyes, a sore throat, and fever. After 1 to 2 days, your baby develops a cough, wheeze, difficulty breathing and problems with feeding and/or sleeping. The wheezing sound usually only lasts 2 to 5 days, and your baby should steadily improve over 7 to 10 days. The cough can last up to 6 weeks. Most babies can be cared for at home.

Antibiotics do not help and are not given. This is because bronchiolitis is caused by viruses and antibiotics only kill bacteria. The viruses are infectious and can be passed onto other babies. Some children get bronchiolitis more than once, and it is not preventable.

The symptoms of bronchiolitis are often confused with asthma. The airways of young babies are floppy and do not tighten as they do in a child with asthma. Most doctors do not diagnose asthma until after the age of 12 months.

What should I do now?

- Keep your child home from childcare or other places with young babies



Patient Information

- Do not smoke cigarettes near your baby. Children who are exposed to cigarette smoke before or after they are born have a much higher chance of getting chest illnesses such as bronchiolitis, asthma, croup, and pneumonia
- Allow your baby to get plenty of rest
- Give plenty of fluids. They may get tired while feeding so be prepared to offer smaller amounts of milk more often or give more frequent breastfeeds. Breastfeeding until the age of 4 months is known to be beneficial

When should I seek medical advice?

- Your baby has trouble breathing, is breathing very fast or irregularly
- Your baby goes blue in colour, is pale and sweaty or seems tired and floppy
- Your baby refuses to eat or drink or has fewer wet nappies than normal

Bronchiolitis is often a mild illness but can get worse quickly.

Babies who were premature or have known heart and lung problems are known to be at increased risk – seek immediate help if you are concerned.

For further advice/information:

- Call NHS 111 (24 hours a day)
- Contact your GP

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact 024 7696 6934 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

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