

## Paediatric department

# Bronchiolitis

## What is Bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis is an infection of the bronchioles which are the smallest breathing tubes (airways) in the lungs. It is caused by an infection (a virus) which causes the airways to become swollen and full of mucous which can lead to breathing difficulties. As many other infections, it can easily spread from child to child.

## Who gets Bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis affects 0-2 year olds. It is very common in babies and about 1 in 3 babies under 1 year of age will get bronchiolitis. It is usually mild and needs no treatment, but some babies develop more serious symptoms. About 3 in 100 cases will need admission to hospital.

Babies at risk of developing a more severe illness include: newborn babies and premature babies, infants who already have heart, lung, or immune conditions, and children with Down Syndrome.

## What are the symptoms of Bronchiolitis?

These can include:

- Cold symptoms: runny nose, cough, mild fever.
- Rasping and persistent dry cough.
- Noisy breathing (wheezing).
- Fast breathing, difficulty breathing.
- Your baby may feed less, vomit after feeding and have fewer wet nappies.

Bronchiolitis usually starts as a cold with breathing problems and a cough beginning 2 - 3 days later. Remember, symptoms vary, and your baby may not experience breathing or feeding difficulties.

## How long does Bronchiolitis last?

Bronchiolitis usually lasts for 1 to 2 weeks, but the cough can last for 3 weeks. The symptoms tend to be worst between 3 and 5 days from the start of the illness and then gradually improve.

## What is the treatment for Bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis is "self-limiting" which means that the body's immune system will fight the infection and it will get better on its own. There is no medicine that will kill the virus and antibiotics are not effective.

In more severe cases your baby may require admission to hospital and the following treatments may be given:

- Oxygen
- Nasogastric tube feeds (this is when a tube is passed into your baby's nostril and down into the stomach so that your baby can be given milk feeds without having to make any effort to feed).
- A very small number of babies with bronchiolitis need to be transferred to Paediatric Intensive Care for help with their breathing with specialist machines.

## What should I do if I suspect my baby has Bronchiolitis?

If you are worried you should contact your GP who will assess your baby. If your baby is well enough to be looked after at home these are the things that you can do to help them:

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- Give your baby smaller more frequent feeds as they may get tired during large, long feeds.
- If your baby has a high temperature, you can give some paracetamol or ibuprofen (always check the packets and follow the correct dose for age).
- Expose your child's chest/tummy to assess breathing.

Bronchiolitis is very infectious, so avoid contact with other babies, especially those who are at risk of becoming seriously unwell.

## When should I seek medical advice?

Please contact your GP or call NHS 111 if you are worried about your baby or if they:

- Are not feeding normally (they have taken less than half their usual amount during the last 2 or 3 feeds).
- Are less than 3 months old and have high temperature of 38° C or above.
- Have not had a wet nappy for 12 hours or more.
- Are breathing faster than usual.
- Have a persistent high temperature of 38°C or above (regardless of their age).
- Seem very tired or irritable (difficult to comfort).

## Call 999 immediately if:

- ➔ Your baby is struggling to breathe – they may grunt or pull in their chest muscles when they breathe (breathing with their tummies or 'seesaw' pattern of breathing).
- ➔ Your baby is having regular short pauses in their breathing.
- ➔ Your baby's skin on the inside of their lips or under their tongue turns blue.
- ➔ You are unable to wake your baby, or, if woken, they do not stay awake.

## How can I reduce the spread of Bronchiolitis?

- Wash your and your child's hands frequently.
- Wash or wipe toys and surfaces regularly.
- Keep infected children at home until their symptoms have improved.
- Keep newborn babies away from people with colds or flu.
- Avoid smoking around your child, and do not let others smoke around them.

## For more information

Your child's GP, health visitor or paediatrician will be able to answer any questions you have.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Bronchiolitis/>

<https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/bronchiolitis/what-is-it>

### Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS)

PALS can provide information, advice and support to patients and relatives and will listen to and act on your concerns, suggestions or queries.

**020 8934 3993**

[khft.pals@nhs.net](mailto:khft.pals@nhs.net)

### Accessible information

We are actively working to make our patient information easier to read and accessible in a range of formats. If you would like this information in large print, audio or electronic format please speak to a member of staff in the department. If you need a different format, please let us know and we will do our best to meet your request

### Pastoral & Spiritual Support Services

We offer a multi-cultural approach serving people of all faiths and life philosophies. A Duty Chaplain is available 24/7. You can request to speak to a Church of England or Roman Catholic Priest, the Rabbi or Imam.

**Please call the hospital switchboard on 020 8546 7711 and ask to speak to the Duty Chaplain.**

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