

Patient information

Bronchiolitis

What is bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis is a viral infection that causes the smaller breathing passages (bronchioles) in the lungs to become swollen (inflamed) and make sticky secretions, which can partly block the passages. Babies and toddlers are more commonly affected than other age groups; this is due to them having smaller breathing tubes than older children and adults. Older children may just suffer a cough or cold but babies are affected more due to smaller breathing tubes. The infection usually begins as an ordinary cough or cold which may then progress to bronchiolitis. The symptoms usually get worse during the first 3 days, then gradually improve.

What causes bronchiolitis?

The infection is passed by direct/close contact. It is infectious while it is active, usually for 3 – 8 days. The most common cause is a virus called Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV). It is very common, especially over the winter months, when nearly all children may become exposed to it.

Signs and symptoms

Your baby may experience some or all of the following:

- Faster breathing rate than normal
- Short of breath
- Wheezy
- Cough
- Snuffly
- Vomit that is slimy (contains mucus)
- Pale, sweaty and more tired than normal
- Feeding less than normal, this is due to them being unable to take large

volumes because of their breathing difficulties but also because the fuller their stomach is the more pressure there is on their lungs

Things you can do at home to help

- Smaller feeds but more often.
- Breathing may be easier for your baby if they sleep with the head of the cot slightly raised.
- If your baby/child has a fever (above 37.4°C) or is irritable, you can give them paracetamol as per manufacturer's guidelines. If your child is 3 months or over they can also have ibuprofen.
- Saline nasal drops: these are available over the counter from a pharmacy. Placing the drops in your baby's nose before they feed may help to relieve a blocked nose *however always follow manufacturer's instructions*.
- Humidify the air: moistening the air may help ease your baby's cough, humidifiers are available to buy. Alternatively, run the hot tap in the bath for several minutes to steam up the room, then sit your baby in the room with you for a few minutes. Their clothes may need changing after this as they may be damp. Be careful not to scald your baby with hot water or steam.
- Nasal aspirator: these can be bought from pharmacies and are used to slowly suck the mucus from your baby's nose. Again, please follow manufacturer's instructions.
- Keep newborn babies away from anyone with a cold or the flu – especially if they're under 2 months old or were born premature

Things that won't help

- Antibiotics: as bronchiolitis is caused by a virus, antibiotics will not help to get rid of the infection
- Large feeds
- Smokey environments: this includes smoke that can be on a smokers clothes
- Lying flat

When should you be worried?

Call 999 or go to your nearest Emergency Department (A&E) if your baby is or has:

- Blue lips, skin or tongue
- Not responding like they would normally to social cues or becomes unresponsive

- Very irritable
- Finding it more difficult to breathe (grunting, nostrils flaring, using stomach muscles to breathe)
- Unusually long pauses in breathing
- Has any underlying health problem such as congenital heart disease or lung condition

Contact your GP/out of hours GP, or use open access to Rainbow Ward (if still valid) if your child is or has:

- Decreased feeding (less than 50 – 75% of normal feeds)
- Passing less urine than normal (no wet nappy for 12hrs)
- They get worse from when you were discharged from hospital and you are worried
- If they are vomiting

Call NHS 111, your GP or Rainbow Ward if you still have valid open access if:

- If you have any concerns or worries about your baby/child

Although your baby / child should be recovered within 2 weeks they may still be coughing or sound wheezy for several weeks. As long as they are feeding well and having no problems with their breathing it is of no concern and they can return to baby groups, child minder or nursery when this is the case.

Further advice

If you are worried or need advice you can call the following departments who can best advise you on what to do:

- Rainbow ward 01284 713315 (24hrs a day)
- Your own GP / GP out of hours
- NHS 111

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (formerly DisabledGo)

<https://www.accessable.co.uk>



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