
Bronchiolitis:

What it means and how you can help your child

Bronchiolitis is an infection of the lungs caused by a virus. It's common in kids, especially in those less than two years old. The most common virus that causes bronchiolitis is called Respiratory Syncytial Virus or RSV.

Here are answers to common questions about bronchiolitis:

What are the symptoms?

- Runny nose
- Coughing and wheezing
- Fever
- Eating or drinking less

While the fever should go away in a few days, the cough might last for 3-4 weeks.

Does my child need antibiotics?

No, antibiotics are not needed. This is because bronchiolitis is caused by a virus, and antibiotics don't work against viruses. Children will usually get better if they have no other infections, rest, and drink fluids. Antibiotics and inhalers will not help the cough or reduce the symptoms.

Does my child need testing?

Children with mild bronchiolitis usually do not need any tests, like X-rays. Getting X-rays when they're not needed can sometimes lead to the wrong diagnosis.

Does my child need to go to the hospital?

In most cases, children will get better at home. But, if a child has severe bronchiolitis, they might need to stay in the hospital to get oxygen and extra fluids.



When should I go to the emergency room with my child?

- They are breathing very fast or working very hard to breathe (with their skin sucking in around the neck and between the ribs).
- Their lips turn blue.
- They seem very sleepy and are hard to wake up.
- They show signs of dehydration, like having a dry mouth, crying without tears, or not having any wet diapers.

What can I do at home?

Dealing with Coughs

- Sitting your child upright safely might ease their cough.
- Don't use over-the-counter cough medications as they don't help and can be harmful to children. They are **NOT recommended** for children under 6 years of age.

Dealing with Nasal Congestion

- Clean their nose as often as needed, especially before feeding or sleeping.
- Use an over-the-counter nasal aspirator or bulb syringe following the directions provided.

Eating and Drinking

- Breast or bottle feed as usual but your baby may need more frequent smaller feeds instead of their usual routine.
- Make sure you offer fluids regularly.

Fever and Discomfort

- You may give Acetaminophen or Ibuprofen to keep your child comfortable. Follow the directions on the package or the advice of a healthcare provider.

How can I prevent the spread of bronchiolitis?

- Try to stay away from people who are coughing and have fevers.
- Cover mouth or nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash hands often.
- Avoid secondhand smoke. Smoking increases the chances of infections.

About Choosing Wisely Canada

Choosing Wisely Canada is the national voice for reducing unnecessary tests and treatments in health care. One of its important functions is to help clinicians and patients engage in conversations that lead to smart and effective care choices.

How this pamphlet was created:

This pamphlet was created by the Bronchiolitis Working Group for Choosing Wisely Canada.

This pamphlet is for you to use when talking with your health care provider. It is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment. Use of this pamphlet is at your own risk.