

Bronchiolitis

What is bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis is a common lung infection in infants and children younger than 2 years of age. It is frequently caused by the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

When does bronchiolitis occur?

Bronchiolitis typically occurs during the winter and early spring.

What are the symptoms?

Bronchiolitis usually begins as a cold, with symptoms of fever, runny nose, and poor appetite or difficulty with sucking in infants. The virus causes a narrowing of the smallest airways in the lungs (bronchioles). This will often cause an infant or young child to breathe more quickly and wheeze (whistling sound when breathing out). These symptoms can last between 2 to 4 weeks.

Is bronchiolitis contagious?

Yes. Infants and young children become infected after close contact with others who are already infected. The viruses that cause bronchiolitis can be spread through sneezing, coughing, and even touching. The virus can even live on surfaces for a few hours.

How is bronchiolitis treated at home?

Most infants and young children with bronchiolitis can be cared for at home. They will need:

- Plenty of rest.
- Encouragement with feedings to prevent dehydration.
- Suctioning the mucous from their nostrils will improve their ability to breath and feed. This can be done by placing 2-3 drops of warm water in each nostril and then sucking out the mucous using a rubber bulb syringe.
- Humidifiers can ease the infant's or child's cough.
- If fever is present, some children will need a non-aspirin fever reducing medication such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- Smoking in the home is strongly discouraged because it can make the illness much worse.

How is bronchiolitis treated in the hospital?

Home therapies may not be enough for some infants and young children and they may have to be admitted to the hospital. They may require the following:

- Children will receive frequent checks by health care staff throughout the day and night.
- A machine called a Pulse Oximeter (a small device that attaches to the finger) may be used to measure the amount of oxygen in your child's blood.
- Most children are offered regular formula or breast milk. In some cases, IV fluids

- may be given temporarily if feeding problems occur.
- Children with a low oxygen level in the blood may require a small amount of extra oxygen to be given by a mask that covers the nose and mouth or tubing attached to just the nose.
 - A respiratory therapist or nurse may deep suction your child's nose by inserting a small suction tube into your child's nostrils and removing any mucous.
 - Most children don't need any type of medicine. Some will require medication for fever. A small number of patients will benefit from medicines that are breathed into the lungs. Antibiotics are not indicated unless your child develops a bacterial infection.
 - The doctor may order lab tests or x rays. Most children do not need them.

Why is my child isolated in the hospital?

Since bronchiolitis is easily spread from one person to another, your child is placed in an isolation room. An isolation sign will be posted on the door to remind others of the following precautions:

- In most cases, the room will be shared with another patient who has like-symptoms. This is called "cohorting". Also, your child will not be able to leave the room while they are in isolation.
- Patients and visitors are asked not to visit other patients in the hospital.
- Hand washing is the best way to prevent the spread of infection. Hands should be washed prior to entering the room and upon leaving the room. Parents or caregivers are encouraged to always practice good hand washing.
- Healthcare workers will put on gowns, gloves and masks to decrease the spread of infection. Visitors other than parents should also wear gowns, gloves and masks when visiting your child.

When will my child be sent home?

Very few children with bronchiolitis stay in the hospital more than 2-3 days. They usually go home when they are:

- Breathing slower and easier.
- Eating and drinking well.
- Able to take medication and oxygen treatments at home.

In addition, your child can be sent home when:

- Parents can perform bulb suctioning at home.
- A follow-up appointment with the patient's doctor has been scheduled.
- And, most importantly, parents and caregivers feel comfortable going home.

1056 East 19th Avenue, Box 100 • Denver, CO 80218 • Toll-Free: 1-800-624-6553 • 303-861-8888

"In Care Of Kids" is a trademark of The Children's Hospital. It is used on patient and family healthcare educational materials produced. This information has been reviewed and approved by designated staff of The Children's Hospital. It is intended to supplement, not replace, medical information provided by the healthcare provider.