

Bronchiolitis

Bronchiolitis is a common illness in young children most often caused by various viruses. Viruses spread when someone who is sick coughs on us, or when our hands are dirty and we touch our mouths, eyes or nose. Bronchiolitis most often happens during the winter months.



It starts with symptoms similar to a common cold such as a runny or congested nose, sneezing, coughing and fever, and then a few days later more coughing, faster and harder breathing, as well as noisy breathing (a wheezing sound), and difficulty drinking fluids. Bronchiolitis usually improves after the first week, but some symptoms can take several weeks to go away completely.

Treatment

There is no specific medicine that can help bronchiolitis go away. This is a viral illness that goes away on its own with time. While your child may have symptoms similar to asthma, this is not asthma and does not respond to the same medications used for children with asthma. Your doctor may prescribe some medication for your child because he or she feels there is another illness that needs to be treated.

When to see a doctor

You should take your child to see a doctor if:

- Your baby is less than two months old and has a fever.
- You are worried your child is not able to drink enough to stay hydrated (either because of congestion, coughing, vomiting or difficulty breathing).
- You feel your child is having trouble breathing.
- Your child has a medical condition that puts him at higher risk for having difficulties with illnesses like bronchiolitis.



How to care for your child at home

Make sure the air in your home isn't too dry

During the winter months, using a humidifier in your home, or taking walks outside in the cool humid air may help your child breathe and rest more easily.

Make sure your child drinks enough fluids

Nasal suctioning with saline water and a nasal aspirator before your child drinks can be helpful, and is safe at any age.

Admission

On very rare occasions, some children become more seriously sick with bronchiolitis and need to be kept in the hospital for a period of time to get hydration with intravenous fluids, and extra oxygen and other help with their breathing.

This kind of treatment is called supportive care, since there is no specific medicine that can cure bronchiolitis even in children who are more seriously ill.

