

# Health Facts

Emergency Department

## Bronchiolitis

### What is it?

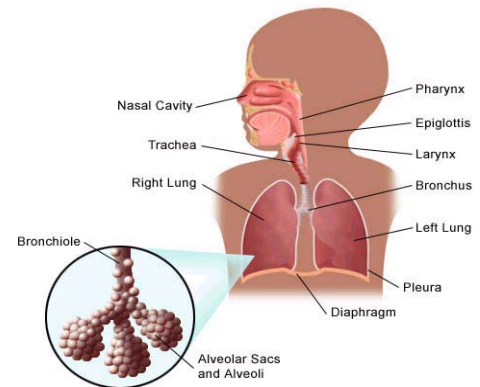
Bronchiolitis is a flu like illness that affects infants in the first year of life. It is caused by one of several viruses, the most common one being RSV (respiratory syncytial virus), which affects the small airways (bronchioles) in the lungs. Bronchiolitis occurs frequently in the winter months and rarely in summer. This condition starts as a simple cold and progresses to a more complicated respiratory illness with symptoms such as cough, wheeze, fast breathing and feeding difficulties.

### Diagnosis

Nasal secretions may be sent to the laboratory to confirm what type of virus your child has. However there is no special test to confirm the diagnosis.

### Home management

- Always try not to smoke in the home or around your baby. This is especially important around babies with any respiratory illness.
- Medicines do not usually help babies with bronchiolitis. Antibiotics are not given because bronchiolitis is caused by a virus and antibiotics do not cure viruses.
- Encourage rest.
- Give shorter breast feeds/formula/water more frequently. This way your child does not get too tired when feeding. If your child does not get enough fluids they can get dehydrated.
- You can give Paracetamol (eg. Panadol<sup>®</sup>, Dymadon<sup>®</sup>, Panamax<sup>®</sup>) if your child is irritable.
- Avoid contact with other babies in the first few days, as bronchiolitis is an infectious disease.



If your baby is distressed and having trouble feeding they may need to be admitted to hospital. Staff may need to:

- Watch them closely to ensure they do not become more unwell.
- Give them some extra oxygen.
- Give them extra fluids through a drip into a vein or tube feed through the nose into the stomach.

### Follow-up

Make an appointment for your child to see a doctor (or return to the emergency department) if they have any of the following:

- Difficulty breathing (very fast or not regular breaths).
- Turns blue or has skin that is pale and sweaty.

# Health Facts

- A cough that is getting worse.
- Taking less than half their normal feeds or are refusing food or fluids.
- Seem very tired or are more sleepy than usual.
- You are worried in any way.

## Key points to remember

- Babies need to rest and drink small amounts more often.
- Bronchiolitis is an infectious disease in the first few days of illness.
- It is more common in babies under six months old.
- Babies are usually sick for 3-5 days and then recover over the next 7-10 days. The cough may continue for 2-4 weeks.
- Smoking in the home increases the chance of babies having bronchiolitis and makes it worse.

Produced by: Emergency © September 2008 CAHS 529P Rev 2, October 2013  
Child and Adolescent Health Service  
Princess Margaret Hospital for Children  
Roberts Road, Subiaco WA 6008 Telephone: (08) 9340 8222

**This information is available in  
alternative formats upon request**

