

# Bronchiolitis (RSV)

## Definition

- A viral infection of the smallest airways in the lungs
- Wheezing is the main symptom
- Average age for getting bronchiolitis is 6 months (Range: birth to 2 years)

## Health Information

### Symptoms

- Wheezing is a high-pitched purring or whistling sound
- You can hear it best when your child is breathing out
- Rapid breathing at a rate of over 40 breaths per minute
- Tight breathing (having to push the air out)
- Coughing (may cough up very sticky mucus)
- Fever and a runny nose often precede the breathing problems.
- Symptoms are similar to asthma. About 30% of children with bronchiolitis later develop asthma. This is more likely if they have close relatives with asthma. Also likely if they have bronchiolitis more than 2 times.

### Diagnosis

- A doctor can diagnose bronchiolitis by listening to the chest with a stethoscope.

### Cause

- A narrowing of the smallest airways in the lung (bronchioles) causes wheezing. This narrowing results from swelling caused by a virus.
- The respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) causes most bronchiolitis. RSV occurs in epidemics almost every winter.
- People do not develop life-long immunity to the RSV virus. This means they can be infected many times.

### Prevention of Spread to Others

- Cover the nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash hands often. After coughing or sneezing are important times.

## Care Advice

### 1. Overview:

- Bronchiolitis is common during the first 2 years of life.
- Most children just have coughing and fast breathing.
- Some develop wheezing. This means the lower airway is becoming tight.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

### 2. Asthma Medicines:

- Some children with bronchiolitis are helped by asthma-type medicines. Most children are not helped by these medicines.
- If one has been prescribed for your child, give it as directed.
- Continue the medicine until your child's wheezing is gone for 24 hours.

3. **Coughing Fits or Spells:**
  - Breathe warm mist (such as with shower running in a closed bathroom).
  - Give warm clear fluids to drink. Examples are apple juice and lemonade.
  - Amount. If 3 - 12 months of age, give 1 ounce (30 ml) each time. Limit to 4 times per day. If over 1 year of age, give as much as needed.
  - Reason: Both relax the airway and loosen up any phlegm.
4. **Homemade Cough Medicine:**
  - Do not give any over-the-counter cough medicine to children with wheezing. Instead, treat the cough using the these tips:
  - AGE 3 months to 1 year: Give warm clear fluids to treat the cough. Examples are apple juice and lemonade. Amount: Use a dose of 1-3 teaspoons (5-15 ml). Give 4 times per day when coughing. Caution: Do not use honey until 1 year old.
  - AGE 1 year and older: Use HONEY ½ to 1 teaspoon (2-5 ml) as needed. It works as a homemade cough medicine. It can thin the secretions and loosen the cough. If you don't have any honey, you can use corn syrup.
5. **Nasal Saline To Open a Blocked Nose:**
  - Your baby can't nurse or drink from a bottle if the nose is blocked. Suction alone can't remove dry or sticky mucus.
  - Use saline (salt water) nose drops or spray to loosen up the dried mucus. If you don't have saline, you can use a few drops of bottled water or clean tap water. (If under 1 year old, use bottled water or boiled tap water.)
  - STEP 1: Put 3 drops in each nostril. (If age under 1 year old, use 1 drop).
  - STEP 2: Suction each nostril out while closing off the other nostril. Then, do the other side.
  - STEP 3: Repeat nose drops and suctioning until the discharge is clear.
  - How often: Do nasal saline when your child can't breathe through the nose. Limit: No more than 4 times per day.
  - Saline nose drops or spray can be bought in any drugstore. No prescription is needed.
  - Other option: use a warm shower to loosen mucus. Breathe in the moist air, then suction.
6. **Humidifier:**
  - If the air in your home is dry, use a humidifier. Reason: Dry air makes coughs worse.
7. **Smaller Feedings:**
  - Use small, frequent feedings whenever your child has the energy to drink.
  - Reason: Children with wheezing don't have enough energy for long feedings.
  - Offer enough fluids to prevent dehydration.
8. **Avoid Tobacco Smoke:**
  - Tobacco smoke makes coughs and wheezing much worse.
  - Don't let anyone smoke around your child.
9. **What to Expect:**
  - Wheezing and rapid breathing usually improve over 2 or 3 days.
  - Mild wheezing may come and go for up to a week.
  - Coughing may last 3 to 4 weeks.
  - Recovery is gradual. Symptoms last longer in young infants.
  - Some children (2%) with bronchiolitis need to be in the hospital. These children need oxygen or fluids given through a vein.
10. **Return to Child Care:**
  - Your child can return to child care after the wheezing and fever are gone.

## Call Your Doctor If

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- Trouble breathing occurs
- Wheezing gets worse (becomes tight)
- Fever lasts more than 3 days
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

### **Pediatric Care Advice**

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