



Children's Community Nursing Team (CCNT)

Care of a child with Bronchiolitis

Information for parents and carers

What is Bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis is an inflammation (swelling) of the smaller breathing passages in the lungs called the bronchioles. They become inflamed and are more swollen and stickier with secretions.

It is common in babies and young children under the age of two and usually occurs in the winter months.

- Most affected babies are not seriously ill, and make a full recovery. Sometimes it becomes more serious and hospital care is needed.
- Symptoms usually get worse over a period of about five days, then gradually improve and settle within a week or two.
- Some babies are more at risk of developing a more severe infection, especially if they were born prematurely, have heart or lung disease, or babies who are exposed to cigarette smoke.

What causes Bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis is usually caused by a virus called the Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV). Other viruses can also cause Bronchiolitis. RSV is a common cause of colds for older children and adults. In some infants it can also infect lower down the airways causing a more severe illness.

What are the symptoms of Bronchiolitis?

- Cough and cold symptoms, and your child may have a temperature for the first two – three days.
- Fast breathing, your child may sound short of breath and sometimes wheezy.
- Your child may have to work harder to breathe, their nostrils may 'flare' and you may be able to see their muscles between the ribs suck in during each breath.
- They may have difficulty feeding and taking longer to feed. This is because your child may be finding it hard to feed and breathe at the same time. Your child may also have a blocked nose.
- Vomiting may occur due to coughing spasms and also because your child may be swallowing mucus from their lungs.
- Your child may have difficulty sleeping and become irritable.
- Premature and very young babies may have episodes where they briefly stop breathing (called apnoea).

Prevention

The RSV virus that usually causes bronchiolitis is very common and impossible to totally avoid. However some measures may help.

- Avoid contact with people with coughs and colds.
- Wash your hands before and after handling your child.
- Keep infants and children in a smoke free environment.
- Do not share your child's toys.

Treating Bronchiolitis

As Bronchiolitis is a 'self limiting' illness, it will normally go as the immune system clears the virus.

There is no medicine that will kill the virus and antibiotics do not work against a virus.

Bronchiolitis is very infectious and is spread the same way as a cough and cold. The germs can spread in tiny drops of fluid from the nose and mouth.

- Airborne with sneezing, coughing and laughing.
- Droplets on used tissues, toys, clothing and furniture.

For further information

Please contact Children's Community Nursing Team

Tel: 0151 252 5064

This fact sheet only gives general information. You must always discuss the individual treatment of your child with the appropriate member of staff. Do not rely on this leaflet alone for information about your child's treatment.

This information can be made available in other languages and formats if requested.

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