

# BRONCHIOLITIS

## What is Bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis is a common viral infection in young children. The virus affects the small airways in the lung, making it difficult to breathe. Smoking in the home increases the chance of babies having bronchiolitis, and makes the symptoms worse.

In many babies the illness has the same features as any other “cold”. However, in some babies the symptoms may be more severe with a cough, wheezy breathing and rapid breathing. If the rapid and wheezy breathing become severe, this may interfere with the baby’s ability to feed and drink adequately, which will result in less wet nappies.

Babies who have been born prematurely are at greater risk of having more severe symptoms with bronchiolitis, especially if they had some lung disease when premature. These babies are also at risk of suffering from apnoeas (episodes where the baby stops breathing).

Your baby has been admitted to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) because he/she has bronchiolitis that has been considered at the severe end of the spectrum and that requires intensive nursing care and observation. Your baby may require assistance with his/her breathing.

## How is bronchiolitis treated?

As bronchiolitis is a viral infection, there is no antibiotic specific treatment. Your baby will be provided with nutrition and respiratory support.

Babies with severe symptoms may require support with their breathing with oxygen, continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP – small plastic tubes placed into the entrance of the nose to supply oxygen under pressure to help make breathing easier), or occasionally ventilation. These babies will often need to have intravenous fluids provided for nutrition, as they are too tired to feed.

## How long will my child be sick?

This depends on many factors, but in most infants the peak of the illness occurs 3-4 days after they initially became unwell. As your infant has been admitted to NICU it is likely that your baby will take up to 7 – 10 days to get better. Some babies may take longer depending on the severity of the illness. Your baby may have a cough that persists for several weeks after he/she has gone home.

Your baby will only stay in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit while he/she needs respiratory support and intensive monitoring. When this is no longer required he/she will be transferred to the paediatric ward for ongoing care.

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**Does this permanently damage my baby's lungs and are they at risk of other respiratory disorders in the future?**

Bronchiolitis is a self-limiting illness and once your baby recovers it is unlikely for there to be permanent damage to the lungs. If your baby gets another respiratory tract infection in the following 6-12 months he/she is at risk of similar symptoms that may require further admission to hospital. As your baby has required admission to NICU, you should seek early medical advice if your baby becomes unwell with another respiratory illness. Babies who have had bronchiolitis are at an increased risk of developing asthma later in childhood, especially if there is a family history of asthma or eczema.

If you have any further questions please ask the medical or nursing staff.

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