Bronchiolitis

Whānau Information

What is bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis is a chest infection caused by a virus. It affects babies in the first year of life, usually in the winter or spring.

How can my baby catch bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis is very infectious. It is passed on by infected secretions from the nose being carried on hands or toys, and less often by coughing. The virus is usually caught from a close contact who has a cold or cough.

How can I tell if my baby has bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis usually starts with symptoms of a cold, such as runny nose, cough and fever. After a day or two, the coughing becomes worse and you might hear a wheezing sound when your baby breaths out. This happens because the virus affects the small breathing tubes (bronchioles) in the lungs and they become narrower.

Sometimes babies may have difficulty breathing, feeding, and/or sleeping.

How long does it last?

The wheezing and difficulty with breathing lasts for several days and then gradually improves. The cough usually lasts 10-14 days but may last for as long as a month.

How can bronchiolitis be treated?

- Most babies with bronchiolitis can be cared for at home.
- Because bronchiolitis is caused by a virus there is no medicine that will cure it. Antibiotics do not help.
- Babies need to rest.
- They should be kept warm but not too hot.
- They should be offered small frequent feeds of breast milk or infant formula. Full feeds may be tiring for babies with bronchiolitis, and cause vomiting.
- Sometimes babies need to be admitted to hospital because of breathing or feeding difficulties, or if they are not able to keep their oxygen levels up.
- Saline drops can help clear a baby's nose if it is blocked.
- Although bronchiolitis may look like asthma, the medicines used to treat asthma do not work in babies with bronchiolitis.

Bronchiolitis is very infectious and contact with other babies should be avoided.

Do not allow anybody to smoke near your baby. Smoke free children recover faster and keep healthier.

Will my baby get bronchiolitis again?

Some babies are more likely to get wheezing with viruses. If babies have repeated wheeze and chest infections with viruses, we may start to call it recurrent viral induced wheeze.

What can be done to lessen the spread of bronchiolitis?

- There is no way of preventing bronchiolitis, but there are things you can do at home to lessen the spread of infection.
- Wash your hands before and after handling your baby.
- If you have a cold yourself, wash your hands before handling your children.
- When you have a cold, use tissues only once and throw used tissues away immediately.
- Make sure your baby's toys are not passed around other children, especially if they have colds.
- If anyone has a cold, especially toddlers or young children, try not to let them kiss or touch your baby's face or hands.
- Most children are contagious for up to 10 days – may be longer in young babies.

Dial 111 if your baby:
- has blue lips and tongue
- has severe breathing difficulty
- is becoming very sleepy and not easy to wake up
- is very pale
- is floppy
- has breathing that is not regular, or has pauses in breathing

See a doctor if your baby:
- is under 3 months old
- is breathing fast, has noisy breathing, and is having to use extra effort to breath
- looks pale and unwell
- is taking less than half their normal feeds
- is vomiting
- has not had a wet nappy for more than 6 hours

Information on your child's admission will be sent to your GP.

Have you changed GP's? Do we have your current GP recorded correctly?

If you do not have a regular GP, please talk to your nurse who can give you a list of GPs in your area.

If you have been discharged from the Children's Acute Assessment Unit, one of the nurses will phone you the next day to check on your child's progress and answer any questions you may have.

If you are concerned over the next 24 hours, please contact us on 364 0428.

Continue to contact your GP for ongoing care of your child.

Notes