

Emergency Services

Bronchiolitis

What is Bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis (sounds like bron-kee-oh-lie-tis) is an infection of the bronchioles. Bronchioles (sounds like bron-kee-ohls) are tiny branches of breathing tubes in the lungs.

This is a common infection in young children (up to 2 years of age). Some children can get so sick that they are admitted to the hospital because of trouble breathing.

The infection is most often caused by a virus called respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

The infection is most common in winter and early spring.

The infection causes the tiny air tubes to swell and make lots of mucous. The swelling and mucous make the air tubes narrow. Narrow air tubes make it hard for your child to breathe.

What to watch for

At first, you might notice your child has a:

- fever
- runny nose
- cough (this is common)

Other signs include:

- fast, shallow breathing
- high-pitched breathing sounds (wheezing)
- irritable, cranky, or tired
- eating or drinking less
- not sleeping well

When to get help

Go to the nearest Emergency Department if:

- Your child is breathing faster than usual.
- Your child's nostrils flare with breathing.
- You can hear a wheezing (high pitched sounds) as your child breathes.
- Your child is 3 months old or younger and has a fever over 38.0°C (100.4°F).
- Your child is throwing up (vomiting).
- Your child is very cranky or fussy and cannot be comforted.
- Your child is dehydrated such as has
 - dry lips, tongue, or mouth
 - no tears
 - no urine (no pee) for 8 hours

Call 9-1-1 right away if:

- Your child is having trouble breathing.
- Your child's skin looks blue or very pale.
- Your child looks like he or she is becoming tired from breathing so hard.
- Your child is grunting with breathing.

How is it treated?

Your child will be sick for about 7 to 10 days.

Because this infection is caused by a virus, your child does not need antibiotics.

Most children can easily be cared for at home. They do not need any special medical treatment.

How to take care of your child at home

- Place your child in a partly sitting or upright position. This makes breathing easier.
- Encourage your child to drink, especially clear fluids such as water or apple juice mixed with water. If your child does not want to drink, give sips more often or try popsicles.
- For children who are breastfed or bottle-fed, continue to feed your child breast milk or formula. You might need to feed your child smaller amounts more often.
- Check that your child has a wet diaper or is going pee 1 or more times every 4 hours.
- If your child is **more than** 3 months old and has a fever over 38.5°C (101.3°F), give medicine to reduce the fever such as acetaminophen (Tylenol or store brand) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, or store brand). If you are not sure how much to give, talk to your pharmacist.
- Do not smoke or let others smoke around your child. Smoke irritates the child's lungs.
- Keep your child at home until breathing is easier. This helps to keep it from spreading to others.

How to prevent the spread of bronchiolitis

This type of infection is very common and easily spreads to others. There are ways you can help to lessen the chances of other children from catching it or your child from catching it again in the future.

- Make sure you, your child, your family, and anyone who handles your child washes their hands often. The best way to keep the infection from spreading is to wash hands.
- Try to keep your child away from others who have a fever or a cold, especially if your child is less than 7 weeks old.
- Have everyone use their own drinking glass.
- Clean toys and countertops often.
- Cover your child's nose and mouth when they cough or sneeze.
- Teach your child to sneeze or cough in their sleeve or elbow when a tissue is not at hand.
- Use tissues one time only. Throw used tissues out right away and clean your hands (and your child's hands).

To learn more, it's good to ask:

- Your family doctor
- Fraser Health Virtual Care
1-800-314-0999 or live chat online at fraserhealth.ca/virtualcare
10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., daily
- HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf and hard of hearing) or go online at HealthLinkBC.ca