

Bronchiolitis

We think that your child is now well enough to go home.

The aim of this leaflet is help you care for your child at home if he/she has bronchiolitis. It explains what the condition is, how the infection is treated and gives you some helpful suggestions to aid your child's recovery at home. If you have any questions or concerns that are not answered in the leaflet, please speak to one of the nursing staff.

What is bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis is a viral infection of the lung that is commonly seen in children under 2-years old, although elderly people can also be affected. The disease is seasonal, usually occurring during the winter months – between late November and early March. The virus, often Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), infects the bronchioles, which are tiny air passages deep inside the lung. The walls of the airways swell, preventing air from moving in and out of the lungs and causing breathing problems.

Is it infectious?

Bronchiolitis is very infectious. It is spread through the air by coughing and on the hands of anyone who handles the soiled tissues, toys and bedding of those infected. Hard surfaces around the bed may be covered in the virus as small children may not cover their mouth when coughing.

How do I know if my child has bronchiolitis?

Around 60% of all babies become infected with the virus before they are 1 year old. A third of these babies will then go on to develop bronchiolitis. The symptoms are initial snuffles and coughs with a fever. This develops into fast and shallow breathing with difficulty feeding. Most babies with bronchiolitis recover quickly but the few that do develop severe bronchiolitis may not be able to feed at all and may have a bluish tinge to their skin and lips. This is due to lack of oxygen and is a sign that medical treatment is urgently needed.

What is the treatment for bronchiolitis?

At present there is no effective cure for bronchiolitis. A full recovery can take up to four weeks but there are a number of things that you can do to help your child's immune

system to overcome the infection. Whilst at home it may be helpful to follow these suggestions:

- Ensure your child gets plenty of rest.
- Sit your child in an upright position to ease their coughing. Put them in an infant seat or tilt the cot mattress up at the head end, by putting a thin pillow or blanket under the mattress.
- Offer your child smaller amounts of milk, but more frequently than usual. He/she will find this easier to manage.
- Give him/her some paracetamol (Calpol) as instructed on the bottle label if required.
- Your child may have a cough or slight wheeze for a few weeks and may be more prone to wheezing during colds in the future. This should improve with time but it is advisable to protect your child from cold, damp weather if at all possible.

What to do if you are concerned about your child



Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust
London Road, Reading RG1 5AN
0118 322 5111 (switchboard)

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

Paediatric Unit, May 2014
Reviewed: April 2017 / TK
Review due: April 2019