

BRONCHIOLITIS: We often think of RSV when

What is it: Bronchiolitis is a lung infection most commonly seen in young children and infants. It causes inflammation of the small airways or bronchioles. Peak time for this illness is Winter and early Spring. Bronchiolitis may last up to 3 weeks but most children will respond well to home care and in most cases the child does not need hospitalization.

Who is at risk: Infants and Children under 3 years of age. Infants younger than 3 months of age are at greatest risk of getting complications from bronchiolitis because their lungs and immune systems aren't yet fully developed.

Other factors that are associated with an increased risk of bronchiolitis in infants, or more severe illness due to bronchiolitis, include:

- Premature birth
- An underlying heart or lung condition
- A depressed immune system
- Exposure to tobacco smoke
- Contact with multiple children, such as in a child care setting
- Having siblings who attend school or child care and bring home the infection

Cause: Most cases of bronchiolitis. Up to 90%, are caused by the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). RSV is a common virus that infects just about every child by the age of 3. Bronchiolitis can also be caused by other viruses, including those that cause the flu or the common cold. Because there are at least 2 different strains of RSV, it is possible for infants to be re-infected.

Symptoms: Bronchiolitis starts out with symptoms similar to those of a common cold but instead of getting better within a week, the symptoms progress to worse coughing, wheezing and sometimes difficulty breathing. Symptoms of bronchiolitis can last for several days to weeks, even a month.

- **Complications:** Apneic episodes (more common in infants under 6 months old)
- Hypoxia
- Dehydration.
- Low oxygen levels and respiratory failure.
- Bacterial or viral pneumonia

How is it diagnosed: Bronchiolitis is typically diagnosed by taking a thorough history of current symptoms and listening to the patient's lung sounds. If there is any doubt, then the doctor may order an x-ray or blood tests to help confirm the diagnosis.

Home Treatment: Because Bronchiolitis is a virus, antibiotics are not helpful. Bronchodilators are often used to keep the airway open and making breathing easier. Some doctors will prescribe nebulizer treatments also. Steroids and chest PT are also good supportive

care. Other treatment includes exposing the patient to warm humidified air (such as that from a running shower or humidifier), saline spray to loosen up thick nasal congestion, feed in smaller more frequent feedings to avoid the child from getting too tired. Treat the fever with Acetaminophen, cool fluids and lightweight clothing.

Did you know? The period of viral shedding is usually 3 to 8 days; but may be longer in young infants in whom shedding could continue for as long as 3 to 4 weeks.

Sources: Mayoclinic.com and Barton Schmitt Bronchiolitis Follow-up Call Protocol 2015 version.