

Bronchiolitis Caregiver Education Handout

What is bronchiolitis?

- **Bronchiolitis** is when the small airways of the lungs are infected, causing swelling and mucus. It commonly leads to breathing problems in infants and children under 2 years of age.
- Bronchiolitis is often caused by respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) but can be caused by many other viruses. The viruses that cause bronchiolitis can lead to other cold symptoms such as fever, runny nose, and cough.

How is bronchiolitis treated?

- Bronchiolitis is diagnosed based on a medical history, your child's symptoms, and a physical exam.
- Bronchiolitis is treated the same regardless of what virus caused the illness, so no testing is needed.
- The symptoms of bronchiolitis are **typically** their worst on days 3-5 of illness and **typically** get better by day 7, but a cough can last several weeks.

What should I expect during the hospital stay?

Because bronchiolitis is caused by a virus, there is no medication we can give to make it better. Our main goal is help support your child during their illness while their body fights off the infection.

- The ways we support your child during this illness include:
 - If your child's oxygen level is low, giving oxygen by tubing that passes the nose (nasal cannula)
 - If your child is unable to drink enough, giving intravenous (IV) fluids
 - If your child has a runny nose and trouble breathing, relieving congestion by suctioning their nose

- If your child has a fever, giving fever medications (acetaminophen) to make your child more comfortable

What can I do to help?

- You can help your child get better by encouraging them to drink fluids and helping us with nasal suctioning - our nurses will show you how!
- Children who have their nose suctioned at a minimum of **every 4 hours** are able to go home sooner.

What criteria do you monitor before sending my child home?

1. Your child is able to keep their oxygen level greater than 88% without any oxygen or breathing support for at least 8 hours
2. Your child is able to take enough fluids to stay hydrated at home
3. Your child will be able to see their pediatrician within 2-3 days of going home
4. You are able to care for your child at home

What should I expect when going home?

- Your child may continue to have symptoms such as faster breathing, noisy breathing, fever, and congestion for several days after going home. Your child's cough could persist for 2-4 weeks.
- Wash your hands often to prevent the spread of infection.
- Avoid exposing your child to cigarette smoke. Secondhand smoke can further irritate your child's lungs.
- Continue to encourage your child to drink fluids to stay hydrated.
- Continue to suction your child's nose to relieve congestion.
- You can continue to give your child acetaminophen or ibuprofen (if greater than 6 months old) as needed for fever/discomfort. Over the counter cough or cold medications are **not** recommended.

When should I seek medical care after going home?

Call your doctor if your child has any of the following:

- Worsening breathing problems which include:
 - Faster breathing
 - Breathing harder than normal
 - Using extra muscles to help with their breathing
 - Unable to eat because of trouble breathing
- A fever for more than 5 days
- A new fever when they are otherwise getting better
- Less than 3 wet diapers per day
- Unable to take in fluids
- Fussier than normal
- Sleeping more than normal
- Has any other concerning symptoms

Questions for your child's providers:

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by Michigan Medicine for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by Michigan Medicine and for which Michigan Medicine does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Author: Division of Pediatric Hospitalist Medicine

Patient Education by [Michigan Medicine](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License](#). Last Revised 09/2019