Bronchiolitis and Your Young Child

What is bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis is an infection that causes the small breathing tubes of the lungs (bronchioles) to swell. This blocks airflow through the lungs, making it hard to breathe. It occurs most often in infants because their airways are smaller and more easily blocked than in older children.

Bronchiolitis is not the same as bronchitis, which is an infection of the larger, more central airways that typically causes problems in adults.

What causes bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis is caused by one of several viruses. Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is the most likely cause from October through March. Other viruses can also cause bronchiolitis. Infants with RSV are more likely to get bronchiolitis with wheezing and difficulty breathing.

Bronchiolitis often starts with signs of a cold, such as a runny nose, mild cough, and fever. After a day or two, the cough may get worse and the infant will begin to breathe faster. The following signs may mean that the infant is having trouble breathing:

✦ He may widen his nostrils and squeeze the muscles under his rib cage to try to get more air in and out of his lungs.
✦ When he breathes, he may grunt and tighten his stomach muscles.
He will make a high-pitched whistling sound, called a wheeze, each time he breathes out.

He may have trouble drinking because he may have trouble sucking and swallowing.

If it gets very hard for him to breathe, you may notice a bluish tint around his lips and fingertips.

This tells you that his airways are so blocked that there is not enough oxygen getting into his blood.

If your baby shows any of these signs of troubled breathing, call your child's healthcare provider at 704-403-7730

**Can bronchiolitis be treated at home?**

There is no specific treatment for RSV or the other viruses that cause bronchiolitis. Antibiotics are not helpful because they treat illnesses caused by bacteria, not viruses. However, you can try to ease your child's symptoms.

**To relieve a stuffy nose**

- Thin the mucus using saline nose drops recommended by your child's doctor.
- Never use nonprescription nose drops that contain any medicine.
- Clear your baby's nose with a suction bulb. Squeeze the bulb first.
- Gently put the rubber tip into one nostril, and slowly release the bulb. This suction will draw the clogged mucus out of the nose.