



## A guide to...

# Bronchiolitis

## *Patient Information*

Children's Emergency Department (CED)

Watford General Hospital



### Caring for your child with a bronchiolitis

Your child has been diagnosed with bronchiolitis.

We are happy that your child is well enough to be taken home under your supervision.

### What is it?

Bronchiolitis is a viral infection of the small airways of the lung ('bronchioles'), and is a common condition in babies and infants under two years old. The bronchioles become inflamed and swollen, and produce more mucous than normal.

Mostly, it is a self-limiting condition, however it can become more serious. It commonly occurs during the winter months (October—March) but can present all year round.

The usual pattern of this virus means that your child's symptoms will peak between days three and five, and then start to improve, with the total course of the illness lasting up to 14 days. The cough may remain for up to four weeks after.

Antibiotics are **NOT** effective against bronchiolitis.

### What causes bronchiolitis?

It can be caused by a variety of different viruses, which are highly contagious. These same viruses, in older children and adults, lead to the common cold.

Bronchiolitis causes a wide range in severity of symptoms; there is no way to predict which children will need supportive treatment, however we know that children are more likely to need help if they:

- Are under three months old
- Have an underlying heart or lung disease
- Were born prematurely
- Have a weakened immune system

## Investigation & Treatment

There are no specific tests for bronchiolitis, it is determined from the history and clinical assessment.

There are no specific treatments, symptoms must be managed as they arise.

## Usual Symptoms

- Cough and runny nose
- Fever—in the neonatal period, this can have the opposite effect and their temperature may drop below 36.5°C.
- Reduced feeding / oral intake
- Lethargy
- Rapid breathing
- Vomiting, especially after coughing

## RED FLAG (WORRYING) SYMPTOMS

If your child has any of the following, please seek urgent medical assessment:

- Cyanosis—blue discolouration commonly seen around the mouth and nose
- Apnoea (periods of no breathing)
- Laboured breathing
- Grunting
- Irritability
- High pitched cry in babies less than six months
- Unable to tolerate more than half of the usual feed amount
- Dehydration — significant decrease in wet nappies
- Fever above 38°C in babies under three months, or above 39°C in babies three to six months old.
- Temperature below 36.5°C in babies less than one month old

## What can you do to help your child?

Most children can be managed at home under the supervision of their parent / carer.

- Keep your baby as upright as possible; this will make breathing and feeding easier. Ensure they are safe and not at risk of falling. NEVER place a pillow or cushion under their head as this is unsafe.
- Give small, frequent feeds
- Administer saline nasal drops to help clear the nostrils; this will help with breathing and feeding
- Avoid cough medicines; there is no evidence to suggest that these work and the cough has a protective function
- Ensure your child is not exposed to cigarette smoke or vapes—this is a proven major risk factor for all childhood respiratory infection.

You may be referred to our community nursing team for daily telephone contact until your child is recovered. Your nurse will advise you of this on discharge.

If you need this leaflet in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01923 217 187** or email **westherts.pals@nhs.uk**



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