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## What is bronchitis?

Bronchitis:

- Is an inflammation of the bronchial tubes or airways in the lungs. These tubes carry air to the lungs.
- Most often happens with a cold and is very common in babies and young children.
- Most times lasts a few days to 10 days.

## What causes bronchitis?

Bronchitis is most often caused by a virus (the same viruses that cause a cold or the flu), not bacteria. Viruses are spread in the air when people cough and touch objects. Antibiotics kill bacteria, but not viruses. This means that antibiotics do not help bronchitis caused by a virus.

If your child is coughing up yellow or green mucus, it may mean that another type of germ is causing the problem. In this case, your child may need an antibiotic.

Other causes of bronchitis include:

- Being around cigarette smoke, dust, chemicals, fumes, strong smells or air pollution.
- Another sickness.
- Allergies.
- Gastric reflux (heartburn).

## What are the possible symptoms?

Your child may have 1 or more of these:

- Cold-like symptoms, such as sore throat and stuffy or runny nose
- A dry, hacking cough with no mucus. This is called a non-productive cough. It may be worse at night.
- A wet cough with mucus. This is called a productive cough.
- Fever (temperature of 100.4°F or higher)
- Not feeling hungry
- Feeling tired
- Vomiting (throwing up) or diarrhea (loose stools)
- Body aches

## What tests could my child have?

Your child may have 1 or more of these:

- Chest X-ray
- Test of their mucus. This is done by sending a sample of your child's mucus to a lab.

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

# Bronchitis, continued

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## What is the treatment?

Most children improve in just a few days, but the cough may last a few weeks. Some things you can do to help are to:

- Keep your child away from cigarette smoke, dust, chemicals, fumes, strong smells and air pollution.
- Make sure your child gets plenty of rest.
- Give your child plenty of clear fluids, such as water and clear soup or broth. Do not force your child to eat solid foods.
- Place a cool mist humidifier by your child's room. This should help your child cough out mucus.
  - Hot steam vaporizers are not safe. They can cause burns.
  - Change the water, and clean the humidifier each day.
  - Follow the cleaning instructions that came with the machine, so it does not grow germs and mold.
- Talk with the doctor before giving your child cold and cough medicines. This includes prescription and over-the-counter medicines.

### **DO NOT:**

- Use cold and cough medicines for children younger than 6 years old. They most often do not work and can cause serious side effects.
- Give a child younger than 6 years old any medicine that is made for children over the age of 6.
- Use more than 1 brand or mix brands. It can cause a serious overdose and harm your child. Many brands of cough and cold medicines have the same kinds of ingredients.
- Use a combination cold medicine that contains acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- Your child's doctor may want your child to use an inhaler with medicine. Ask the doctor or pharmacy how to use it.
- Give acetaminophen (Tylenol or less costly store brand) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil or less costly store brand) for fever or pain if advised by your doctor. Follow the directions on the box carefully, or ask your child's doctor how much medicine to give.

### **DO NOT:**

- Give your child more than 5 doses of acetaminophen in 24 hours.
- Give acetaminophen to babies younger than 3 months old without talking with your child's doctor.
- Give ibuprofen to babies younger than 6 months old without talking with your child's doctor.
- Give acetaminophen and ibuprofen together, unless advised by your child's doctor.
- If the doctor orders antibiotics, give them as advised for the full amount of time. Do this even if your child starts to feel better.

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# Bronchitis, continued

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## How can I help prevent the spread of germs?

- Hand hygiene is the most important thing you can do to help prevent the spread of germs.
  - Use soap and water to wash your hands well for at least 20 seconds. Rinse and dry them well.
  - You may use an alcohol-based gel or foam, but only if your hands do not have dirt or grime on them.
  - Have your child wash their hands.
- Teach your child to cough or sneeze into their elbow, not their hands.

## When can my child return to day care or school?

Keep your child home until they:

- Feel better.
- Have no fever without using medicines for 24 hours.

## When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor **right away** if your child:

- Does not show interest in play, such as TV, games or the computer, for at least a few minutes every 4 hours.
- Wheezes or breathes harder than when they last saw the doctor.
- Has a tight feeling in the chest.
- Is not better or has a feeling of tiredness and weakness after 3 days.
- Has a new fever (temperature of 100.4°F or higher) since they last saw the doctor.
- Has a fever that lasts longer than 2 or 3 days.
- Has a cough that lasts longer than 2 to 3 weeks or gets worse.

Also call the doctor if you have any questions or concerns about how your child looks or feels.

## When should I call 911?

Call 911 **right away** if your child:

- Is so tired and weak that they hardly respond to you.
- Is working **very** hard to breathe or finds it hard to take a breath.
- Grunts when they breathe.
- Has chest retractions (skin pulling in around the ribs and chest when breathing).
- Has a blue or dark purple color to the nails, lips or gums.
- Stops breathing for more than 10 seconds.
- Cannot talk while breathing.
- Has any breathing problem that needs care **right away**.

**This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.**

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