

Dr Jenny Gregor
Neonatologist & Paediatrician
Suite 3, Ground Floor
271 Clayton Rd
CLAYTON VIC 3168
Ph: 1300 657 257
Fax: 03 8526 0302
www.carepaediatrics.com.au



Bronchiolitis

Bronchiolitis is a viral infection of the lungs and upper airways that generally affects children under 12 months of age. The worst stage of the illness is around 3-4 days of the illness with resolution over 7 to 10 days. Very young babies, ex premature babies, babies with congenital problems of the lung or heart can become extremely unwell with bronchiolitis. If your child has a runny nose and a cough, working harder to breathe and possibly an audible wheeze they may have bronchiolitis. Often babies who are working harder to breathe will not be able to feed well as they have difficulty breathing through a blocked nose while feeding and because their lungs are not working as well they tire more easily when they are using energy to feed. If your baby is passing less wet nappies (less than 4 in 24/14 or noticeably drier nappies) then you should arrange a review by your family doctor.

If you notice your baby has increased work of breathing, is having pauses in breathing (apneas) longer than 10 seconds in duration or who looks blue either at rest or during feeds you need to seek urgent medical review at an emergency department. In most children with bronchiolitis no investigations are required. If the doctor reviewing your child is unsure regarding the diagnosis or your child has a history of lung or heart problems preceding this illness blood tests or a chest Xray may be arranged.

The main treatment of bronchiolitis is supportive. Antibiotics or inhalers are usually not helpful. Supportive management involves ensuring that your child's oxygen levels are normal and they are receiving enough fluid. Children are often more settled if comfort oral feeds are continued. Mild bronchiolitis can often be managed at home with a medical review on a daily basis until the illness improves. Babies will often require smaller more frequent breast or bottle feeds. If a doctor recommends admission to hospital your infant may need a small feeding tube inserted into their nose to give milk or gastrolyte directly into the stomach or they may require an intravenous line into the back of their hand to given them sugar and fluids. Avoid contact with other babies while your child is unwell as the viruses that cause bronchiolitis are very contagious. It is also important to ensure a smoke free environment.