



Bronchitis/Bronchiolitis

Bronchitis and bronchiolitis are respiratory conditions that tend to occur more often in the fall and winter months. When infants and young children experience common respiratory viruses and are exposed to secondhand tobacco smoke, they are at risk of developing bronchiolitis, bronchitis, pneumonia, and middle ear infections.

School health and childcare provider information

Cause

Many different viruses, such as respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), parainfluenza, influenza, and adenoviruses; *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*; and some bacteria. Most of these organisms can cause other illnesses and not all persons exposed to the same organism will develop bronchitis or bronchiolitis.

Symptoms

Usually starts with a runny nose, fever, and a dry, harsh cough that becomes looser as the illness progresses. Older children may cough up green or yellow sputum. Sore throat can occur in some cases. It may take 1 to 2 weeks for the cough to stop.

Spread

Respiratory viruses and bacteria are spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes tiny droplets into the air, and another person breathes them in. They also can be spread by touching the secretions from the nose and mouth of an infected person or by touching hands, tissues, or other items soiled with these secretions and then touching one's eyes, nose, or mouth.

Incubation

Varies depending upon the organism that is causing illness.

Contagious period

Shortly before symptoms begin and for the duration of acute symptoms.

Exclusion

Childcare and School

Until fever is gone without the aid of fever reducing medication and the child is well enough to participate in routine activities.

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Diagnosis

Recommend that parents/guardians call their health care provider if their child has a high fever, persistent sore throat, or persistent cough lasting longer than 3 weeks.

Treatment

Since viruses cause most cases of acute bronchitis or bronchiolitis, antibiotics will not be effective. **Do not give aspirin or salicylate-containing medications to any child or adolescent under 18 years of age.**

Prevention

- Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing and sneezing or cough/sneeze into your sleeve. Dispose of used tissues.
- Wash hands often and thoroughly with soap and warm running water especially after contact with secretions from the nose or mouth. Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects, and surfaces at least daily and when soiled (see Section 2).

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at 612-543-5230 or call your local health department.

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