

Bronchitis

Bronchitis is a chest infection, usually caused by a virus. The virus makes the lining of the windpipe and bronchi (the tubes leading from the windpipe to the lungs) inflamed and swollen, so it produces more mucus than normal. This causes a cough and sometimes a pain in the throat or upper chest when coughing. Bronchitis is usually mild in children.

A child with bronchitis may have the usual signs of a cold, including a runny nose, sore throat and mild fever. Next, they develop a cough. The cough is often dry at first and then becomes moist after a couple of days. They may have a slight wheeze and shortness of breath.

Children usually recover from bronchitis in 5 to 10 days. Some children keep having attacks of bronchitis and can develop ongoing symptoms (called chronic bronchitis). This can be due to allergies, people smoking around them or other problems in their lungs.

How it spreads

Bronchiolitis spreads by droplets in the air that contain the virus or direct contact with mucus or saliva. People get infected by:

- breathing in droplets when an infected person kisses, breathes, coughs or sneezes on them
- touching a surface contaminated with droplets – for example, hands, tissues, toys or eating utensils – and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

Exclusion period

If a person has respiratory symptoms (cough, sneezing, runny or blocked nose, sore throat), exclude them only if:

- the respiratory symptoms are severe, **or**
- the respiratory symptoms are getting worse (more frequent or severe), **or**
- they also have concerning symptoms (fever, rash, tiredness, pain, poor feeding).

Otherwise do not exclude.

A person can often have an ongoing cough after they have recovered from a respiratory infection. If their other symptoms have gone and they feel well, they can return to the service.

Actions for educators and other staff

If a staff member is sick, they should stay home until they feel well.

Ensure staff and children have good hand and respiratory hygiene.

Ensure staff use appropriate cleaning practices, as described in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

Actions for parents and carers

Keep your child at home until their symptoms have gone and they feel well. If your child still has a cough, but their other symptoms have gone and they feel well, they can return to the service.

Teach your child to cough or sneeze into a tissue, then throw the tissue into a bin and wash their hands. If there are no tissues nearby, teach them to cough or sneeze into their inner elbow instead of their hands.

Make sure your child washes their hands thoroughly and often.

Avoid contact between your child and other children, or frail and elderly people, until the child is feeling well.

More information about bronchitis

See healthdirect for more information on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of bronchitis (healthdirect.gov.au/bronchitis).

To find out if a child needs medical help:

- use the online symptom checker (healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker)
- speak to a registered nurse by calling the 24-hour health advice hotline on 1800 022 222.