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The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

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Bronchiolitis – Information for parents and carers (page 1 of 2)

What is bronchiolitis?

Bronchiolitis is an infection of the small airways (the bronchioles) of the lung. It occurs in babies under 12 months of age. It is caused by a virus in the lungs which causes your child to have difficulty with breathing. Medicines do not usually help babies with bronchiolitis. They need to rest and have small feeds more often, so they don't get too tired when feeding and do not get dehydrated.

What are the symptoms?

The illness begins as a cold. After a day or so, your baby begins to cough, and the breathing becomes fast and sounds wheezy. This fast, wheezy breathing can make it difficult for your baby to eat or drink. Some children may need to be admitted to hospital because of these problems.

The first symptoms your child may have are the same as a common cold; for example runny nose, cough and stuffiness. These symptoms last 1-2 days.

They are followed by an increase in problems related to breathing, such as:

- very fast breathing
- poor feeding
- noisy breathing (wheezing)
- drawing in the chest with each breath
- fever.

Babies with bronchiolitis are usually worst on the 2nd or 3rd day and are often sick for 7-10 days. Their cough may continue for 2-4 weeks.

When should I get advice?

These symptoms can be very worrying for parents, but most cases of bronchiolitis are not serious. However, if your child is showing symptoms of bronchiolitis and they are under 12 weeks old, were born prematurely, or they have an underlying health problem such as a congenital (present from birth) lung or heart condition, you should see your GP as soon as possible.

Contact your GP if:

- you are worried about your baby

Sarum Ward
01722 336262 ext 2560

- your baby is having difficulty breathing
- your baby is taking less than half of their normal feeds over 2-3 feeds
- your baby has no wet nappy for 12 hours or more
- your baby has a high temperature (over 38°C)
- your baby seems very tired or irritable.

Dial 999 for an ambulance if:

- **your baby is having a lot of difficulty breathing and is pale and sweaty,**
- **your baby's tongue and lips are turning blue, or**
- **there are long pauses in your baby's breathing (more than 10 seconds).**

How can I help my baby?

- encourage rest. Breathing may be easier for your baby if he or she sleeps with the head of the cot slightly raised
- give shorter breast feeds/formula/water more often. This way your child does not get too tired when feeding
- as bronchiolitis is an infectious disease, avoid contact with other babies in the first few days
- ensure a smoke-free environment. Passive smoking (breathing in somebody else's cigarette smoke) can seriously damage your baby's health. It can make breathing problems like bronchiolitis worse
- if you are worried about your baby, contact your GP.

What is the treatment for bronchiolitis?

Medicines do not usually help babies with bronchiolitis. Antibiotics are not given because bronchiolitis is caused by a virus. Antibiotics do not cure viruses.

The aims of treatment include the following:

- to make sure the baby does not dehydrate (become low in body fluids). This may occur if the baby does not feed or drink well
- to help with breathing if this becomes difficult
- to be alert for possible complications.

What will happen if my child is admitted to hospital?

If your child is admitted into hospital, humidified oxygen (warmed and moistened) will probably be given to maintain the oxygen levels in the blood, through either a headbox or through tubes placed up the nose.

Feeds may be given via a tube passed into the stomach, or fluids may be given intravenously (directly into the vein) to avoid dehydration.

Rarely, your child may need assisted ventilation to help them breathe. Some babies become seriously ill, or develop pneumonia as a complication. In a small number of cases intensive care is needed.