

Wheezing and breathing difficulties

Look at the signs

Any kind of breathing difficulty your infant or child experiences can be scary for parents. It is often nothing to worry about and illnesses like bronchiolitis, mild croup and a cough can often be treated at home.

Use your instincts with newborns and babies. It could be:

- Rapid breathing or panting, which is common. There is no other sign of illness, it comes and goes and your baby is breathing comfortably most of the time, there's normally no need to worry.
- Breathing may sound a bit rattly. Try holding your baby upright.
- Occasional coughing or choking which may occur when a baby takes in milk too quickly with feeds. Try to slow things down a bit. Check feeding position.
- A cold or mild cough. Keep an eye on them at this stage and use your instincts. If you are worried talk to your health visitor.

In older babies and toddlers you may notice:

- Coughing, runny nose, mild temperature - (see page 20 coughs, colds and flu).
- Croup (hoarse voice, barking cough) needs to be assessed by a doctor and may need treating with steroids.
- Child appears pale.

GP's tips

Get help and contact your GP now if your child:

- Seems to find breathing hard work and they are sucking in their ribs and tummy.
- They can't complete a full sentence without stopping to take a breath.

Get help and call 999 or take them to A&E if:

- Their chest looks like it is caving in.
- They appear pale or even slightly blue-ish.

Bronchiolitis

Bronchiolitis is a common respiratory tract infection that affects babies and young children under a year old. The early symptoms are similar to those of a common cold and include a runny nose and cough.

As it develops, the symptoms of bronchiolitis can include: A slight fever, a persistent cough and difficulty feeding.

Symptoms usually improve after three days and in most cases the illness isn't serious. However, contact your GP or health visitor if your child is only able to feed half the normal amount or is struggling to breathe, has not had a wet nappy for more than 12 hours, or if you are generally worried about them.

1

My child with croup has a distinctive barking cough and makes a harsh sound, when they breathe in.

2

Comforting your child is important as symptoms may worsen if they are agitated or crying. Mild cases of croup can be managed at home. If your child has a fever, children's paracetamol will help lower their temperature.

3

Some people have found that allowing their child to breathe in steam from a hot bath or shower in a closed room has eased symptoms. Take care as there is a risk of scalding if your child is left alone. If symptoms get worse contact your GP.

Source: NHS Choices - Symptoms of bronchiolitis