

# COUGHS AND NOISY BREATHING IN YOUNG BABIES




## Advice from THE LITTLE ORANGE BOOK



Young babies often catch lots of coughs and colds, and their breathing can become noisy. Often, these illnesses can be managed with self-care at home.

The babies most likely to need hospital care are those under 3 months of age, those born prematurely (less than 32 weeks), and children with cystic fibrosis, heart or muscle problems such as cerebral palsy. Please follow the advice below and in **the Little Orange Book**:

### When to care for your baby at home

-  **SELF CARE**
- ☒ **OFF NURSERY OR SCHOOL?**
- Occasional snorts and grunts in young babies are completely normal and nothing to worry about.
  - Many young babies in their first 2 - 3 months can have short episodes where they breathe faster and deeper, then more slowly and less deeply. They can pause and not take a breath for 5 to 10 seconds before starting with the deeper breaths again. This comes and goes, and if the baby is their usual colour and feeding well, it's normal.
  - If you're unsure or the problem doesn't go away, call your GP or health visitor.





#### Impact of smoking

Children who breathe cigarette smoke are more at risk of:  
Coughs, colds and ear infections  
Asthma and asthma attacks  
Serious chest infections  
Cot death (Sudden Infant Death /SIDS)- Risk doubled  
Meningitis



Call 0800 022 4332 for help to quit or visit [SMOKEFREE's website](#).

#### TOP TIP

### When you may need to call the GP

-  **CONTACT YOUR GP**  
if the problem doesn't settle
-  **USUAL LENGTH OF ILLNESS**  
7-10 DAYS
- ☒ **OFF NURSERY OR SCHOOL?**  
(unless too ill to attend)
- Bronchiolitis is a viral infection that affects babies and children up to age 2 years, usually in winter. 1 in 3 babies have had it by their first birthday.
  - It starts with the symptoms of a cold and a 'musical' sounding cough.
  - After 2-3 days, the lungs also make mucus so your baby will sound 'like a coffee machine' because their chest is full of funny rattles and wheezes which make it harder for them to feed.
  - If your child is unhappy with the cough and has a fever, paracetamol or ibuprofen can be given. Most bronchiolitis is MILD and your baby's breathing and reduced feeding will be much better after 5 days. Your baby may still sound 'like a coffee machine' for 3 more weeks but they will usually be happy and feeding well.
  - Exposure to cigarette smoke, indoors or outdoors, can make bronchiolitis worse.

### When to seek urgent help from 111

-  **CONTACT YOUR GP**
-  **CALL 111**
- Pauses in breathing that last longer than 10 seconds, and changes in colour with or without reduced feeding can be a sign of bronchiolitis or other serious illness in babies less than 3 months old. They need to be seen by a doctor within 2 hours. **Call 111.**



#### TOP TIPS

When your baby is tired and struggling to feed because of their breathing, feeding for a shorter period of time but more frequently can help them to get enough milk.

#### TOP TIP

**Stop passing them on!**  
Germs spread easily. Follow these 3 easy steps to stop passing them on.



**Catch it**  
Use tissues to catch coughs and sneezes



**Bin it**  
Get rid of the tissues straight away



**Kill it**  
Wash away the germs with soap and water

### When to call 999



#### If your child

- is struggling to breathe and breathing more than 60 breaths per minute at any age under 5 years (1 breath every second)
- has croup, and cannot breathe lying down and/or if the stridor noise is there even when your child is calm
- is grunting (an 'effort' noise with every breath in)
- has caving in of their chest with every breath
- has pauses in breathing lasting longer than 10 seconds, especially if under 3 months of age
- looks very pale and lips are blue or your child is floppy and exhausted/difficult to wake up
- is under 3 months of age and has a temperature over 38°C
- has a rash that doesn't fade with pressure



#### UNSURE WHICH SERVICE TO USE?

GP practices are open and are offering face to face appointments. Call your GP practice between 8am - 6pm weekdays. After 6pm or during the weekend call NHS111.



111 is the urgent health advice line that can be contacted 24 hours a day, including overnight and at weekend (and it's free even from a mobile).

A&E is for life threatening emergencies only.