

What is bronchitis?

- Bronchitis is a respiratory illness.
- An infection causes an inflammation of the bronchial tubes. (The bronchial tubes connect the windpipe to the lungs.)
- Bronchitis can be either acute or chronic.
- Symptoms of acute bronchitis come on quickly and may be severe. The condition lasts no more than a few days to a few weeks.
- Chronic bronchitis lasts longer than acute bronchitis. It may last months or years.

What causes it?

- Acute bronchitis is usually caused by a viral infection but can also be caused by a bacterial infection.
- Gastroesophageal reflux disease, also known as heartburn, can lead to bronchitis.
- The most common cause of chronic bronchitis is smoking.

Who can get it?

- Anyone can get bronchitis. In fact, most people have bronchitis at least once in their lives.
- Bronchitis is common after having a cold.
- Most people with chronic bronchitis are smokers. People who are around second-hand smoke, such as children living with parents who smoke, are also at risk for getting chronic bronchitis.

What are the signs and symptoms?

- Bronchitis often starts with a dry cough.
- The cough may bring up mucus (thick white, yellow, or greenish fluid).
- Symptoms can also include headache, fever, chills, shortness of breath, soreness or tightness in the chest, and wheezing.
- A person with chronic bronchitis experiences most of these symptoms for many days. Breathing may be very difficult for them.
- People with asthma and bronchitis are more likely to experience chest tightness and shortness of breath.
- While a person has bronchitis, he is more likely to be infected by a second respiratory illness.

Is it contagious?

- Yes. Bronchitis is contagious.
- It can be spread by coughing, sneezing, and touching items an infected person has used.

How is it treated?

- Take your child to the doctor if he shows symptoms of bronchitis.
- The doctor will listen to his chest and may take x-rays.
- Acute bronchitis is usually caused by a virus. Using antibiotics is not helpful.
- The best treatment is to rest, drink plenty of fluids, and use an over-the-counter medicine to treat the pain and fever.
- Coughing helps bring up mucus and get rid of germs. Use a cough medicine that eases, but does not stop coughing. Ask your doctor.
- Using a humidifier may help relieve symptoms. Wash the humidifier each day.

- In some cases, the doctor will recommend using a medicine called a bronchodilator that makes breathing easier.
- People with chronic bronchitis should stop smoking and avoid second-hand smoke.
- Avoid things that could make symptoms worse, such as air pollution and allergens.
- For more information on how smoking affects health and suggestions for quitting, read about smoking and tobacco.

How long does it last?

- Acute bronchitis lasts no more than a few days or a few weeks.
- Chronic bronchitis can last months or years.

Can it be prevented?

- To prevent the spread of germs, wash hands often.
- Do not smoke, stop smoking, and avoid second-hand smoke.

When should I call the doctor?

- Call your doctor if your child has symptoms of bronchitis.
- Call your doctor if symptoms of bronchitis last a long time.
- Call if your child is coughing up blood.
- Call the doctor if you have questions or concerns about your child's treatment or condition.

Quick Answers

- Bronchitis is a respiratory illness. It can be either an acute or chronic condition.
- Acute bronchitis is often caused by a viral or bacterial infection. Chronic bronchitis is often caused by smoking.
- Anyone can get bronchitis. It is a common illness. Smokers are at high risk for getting chronic bronchitis.
- Symptoms include a cough, wheezing, fever, and soreness in the chest.
- Bronchitis is contagious. It can be spread by direct or indirect contact.
- To treat bronchitis, doctors usually recommend rest, drinking plenty of fluids, and using an over-the-counter medication to ease coughing.
- Acute bronchitis lasts no more than a few weeks. Chronic bronchitis can last months or years.
- Wash hands often to avoid the spread of germs. Stop smoking and avoid smoke.
- Call your doctor if your child has symptoms of bronchitis or if you have questions or concerns.

References

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