

What is bronchitis?

Acute bronchitis, sometimes called chest cold, is one of the most common conditions seen in a doctor's office. It is the general term used to indicate inflammation (swelling) of the airways in the lungs called the bronchi. Bronchitis is typically caused by a virus.

Who is at risk for bronchitis?

People of all ages can contract bronchitis. However, if you have had a recent illness or other lung infection or if you are a smoker, you may be more likely to become infected. Also, lung problems such as asthma, cystic fibrosis or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), will put you at a higher risk of bronchitis.

What are the symptoms of bronchitis?

Symptoms include a cough that is often worse at night. People may also have shortness of breath, wheezing, a "rattling" sensation in the chest, a slight fever, poor sleep, tickling in the back of the throat that can lead to soreness, and an overall general ill feeling.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The appearance of symptoms will depend on the type of germ that caused the bronchitis. If it is the virus that causes the common cold or flu, symptoms may appear within a few days. Symptoms can take longer to appear for other virus infections. Symptoms may last for several weeks.

How is bronchitis spread?

The germ that causes the illness determines how bronchitis is spread. You can help prevent the spread of any respiratory infection by practicing simple hygiene, such as covering your cough and washing your hands frequently.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

This also depends on the germ that causes the illness. Talk with your healthcare provider about the type of bronchitis you have, how it is spread, and the length of time you might be contagious.

How is a person diagnosed?

A variety of tests can determine whether you have bronchitis and what type of germ has caused the illness. These tests can be done on sputum or other respiratory specimens. Additionally, chest x-rays or other lung function tests may be done.

What is the treatment?

If it is a virus that caused the illness, you may only need supportive care; antibiotics will not work on viruses. If it is a bacterium that caused your illness, your doctor may prescribe an antibiotic. As always, talk with your healthcare provider about specific treatment options.

Does past infection make a person immune?

This will depend on the germ that caused the infection.

Should children or others be excluded from child care, school, work or other activities if they have bronchitis?

No, infants, toddlers and school-aged children should not be excluded unless the staff determines the child is unwilling or unable to participate in activities.

They should also be excluded if the staff determines that they cannot care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the health and safety of the other children in the group.

All others can attend work and other functions as long as they are well enough to do so and are able to practice good hand washing and respiratory etiquette.

What can be done to prevent the spread of bronchitis?

Everyone should practice respiratory precautions, such as covering coughs and sneezes, throwing tissues in the trash and frequent hand washing.

Additional Information:

Additional information is available by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

Resources:

1. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30th ed. [Children in Out-Of-Home Care]. Kimberlin, DW; Brady, MT; Jackson, MA; Long, SS. American Academy of Pediatrics. 2015: 132-151.
2. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30th ed. [Bronchitis]. Kimberlin, DW; Brady, MT; Jackson, MA; Long, SS. American Academy of Pediatrics. 2015: 136-140.
3. Mayo Clinic. (2014). Retrieved June 30, 2014 from <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/bronchitis/basics/definition/con-20014956>