



Lower Respiratory Tract Infections

Patient information Leaflet

January 2020

Introduction

This leaflet helps you understand lower respiratory tract infection (LRTI), how to make your child comfortable, and when to seek emergency advice.

What is a LRTI?

A Lower Respiratory Tract Infection is an infection of the lungs. It can affect one or both lungs and is most commonly caused by a virus. Some common viruses causing LRTIs include adenoviruses, rhinoviruses, influenza virus, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and parainfluenza virus. These viruses are spread through tiny drops of liquid from another infected person, usually passed on when they cough or sneeze.

Viruses in a LRTI cause the lungs to become swollen and inflamed. This reduces the amount of air that can enter the lungs, and makes it more difficult to breathe. There is no medication to kill the viruses that cause LRTIs- they don't respond to antibiotics- but a child's immune system can normally fight them off.

Less commonly, LRTIs can also be caused by bacteria- the most common is streptococcus pneumoniae. They are spread in the same way as viruses and they also cause swelling and inflammation in the lungs. In this case, antibiotics are used to kill the bacteria.

Signs and Symptoms

The first symptoms of a LRTI are usually cold-type symptoms such as a blocked nose, a cough or a fever. Children often have decreased activity and there may be a loss of appetite in older children, or decreased feeding in babies. Contact your GP if you are worried about your child's symptoms, or you see any of the following:

- Your child has taken less than half the amount they would normally do in the last two to three feeds.
- No wet nappies (or toilet visits) for twelve hours or more.
- Faster breathing, or wheezing when they breathe
- A temperature of over 38°C.
- Being very tired or irritable

Sometimes symptoms can become severe quickly and more urgent help is needed. If you noticed any of the following symptoms you should call 999 for an ambulance:

- Severe breathing difficulties, or exhaustion from working so hard to breathe.
- Extremely fast breathing (over 60 breaths per minute)
- Pauses in your child's breathing for ten seconds or more
- A very sleepy child who you are not able to wake or, when they have been woken, cannot stay awake
- If your child's skin starts to turn blue, especially around the lips or fingers

How is a LRTI diagnosed?

A doctor will examine your child and may organise some tests. These will include assessing your child's general health by looking at their breathing, their heart rate, and their temperature, and listening to their chest using a stethoscope. They will also use a machine called a 'pulse oximeter' to measure the amount of oxygen in your child's body. Tests may also include blood tests, a chest x-ray, or a culture of the mucus your child produces while coughing.

How is a LRTI treated?

If the LRTI is caused by a virus, there is no treatment that can kill the virus. We will help to support your child so that they can fight off the infection on their own.

If the LRTI is caused by bacteria, your child might need to take a course of antibiotics. In most cases, antibiotics can be given at home. Sometimes a stay in hospital is needed so that antibiotics can be given straight into the veins.

Whether caused by a virus or bacteria, sometimes children need extra support to help them fight off the condition. This can involve help with their feeding or support with their breathing.

If your child is finding feeding difficult because of their illness, they may need to have fluids or milk through a feeding tube. This is a thin tube that goes up your child's nose and down into their stomach. It means they don't have to use up as much energy eating or drinking and allows them to rest. Sometimes children need fluids directly into a vein if they struggle to tolerate feeding through a tube.

If your child is struggling to breathe because of the LRTI they will be given extra oxygen through a mask that goes over their face or a small tube that sits at the base of their nostrils. This will make it easier for them to breathe and help them to feel more comfortable.

How can I help my Child?

Whatever causes your child's LRTI and wherever they are treated, there are some things you can do to help them:

- Help them to get plenty of rest, keep the environment calm, and reassure them.
- Unless you are told otherwise, offer them small amounts of fluids frequently. Don't worry if they don't want to eat their normal amount for a few days- they will catch up when they are feeling better.
- Paracetamol and/or Ibuprofen can be offered for fever or discomfort. Follow the instructions on the bottle/packet and do not exceed the stated dose.
- Keep your child in a smoke-free environment

Preventing LRTIs

There is no specific way to completely prevent LRTIs, however there are some steps that you can take to lower your child's risk of catching it:

- Practice good hand hygiene: wash yours and your child's hands regularly and especially after going to the toilet and before meals.
- Clean toys and surfaces regularly
- Keep infected children at home until their symptoms have improved

If you have any questions you want to ask, you can use this space below to remind you

If you have a visual impairment this leaflet can be made available in bigger print or on audiotape. If you require either of these options please contact the Patient Information Centre on 0161 922 5332

If you require an interpreter, please ask an appropriate person to contact our central booking office between Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm on 0161 922 6991 to arrange this for you.

語言翻譯及病者支持服務 (LIPS):

如果閣下需要翻譯員在您的預約當日幫助您的話 請找一名合適的家庭成員 **0161 922 6991** 聯絡本中央預約辦事處來您您安排 我們的辦公時間是星期一至星期五 上午 8 時至下午 5 時

Językowo Tłumaczeniowa Usługa Pomocy dla Pacjenta (Language, Interpretation and Patient Support Service LIPS):

Jeśli potrzebujesz pomocy tłumacza w trakcie swojej wizyty, proszę poprosić odpowiedniego członka rodziny o skontaktowanie się z Centralnym Biurem Zamówień (Central Booking Office), w celu zorganizowania tłumacza pomiędzy poniedziałkiem a piątkiem w godzinach od 08:00 - 17:00 pod numerem **0161 922 6991**.

لینگوئج، انٹرپریٹیشن اینڈ پیٹینٹ سپورٹ سروس (Lips)

اگر آپ کو اپنی اپائنٹمنٹ کے لئے مترجم کی مدد کی ضرورت ہو تو براہ مہربانی اپنے خاندان کے کسی موزوں فرد سے کہیں کہ وہ ہمارے سنٹرل بکنگ آفس سے پیر سے جمعہ 8.00 بجے صبح سے 5.00 بجے شام کے دوران 0161 922 6991 پر فون کر کے اس کا بندوبست کریں۔

Document control information

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