

# Viral induced wheeze

Information for parents and carers

---

**Royal Hospital for Children and Young People, Edinburgh**  
**And**  
**St John's Hospital Children's Ward, Livingston**

## Emergency contact numbers

**GP surgery:**

**NHS 24: 111**

**Hospital:**

## What is viral induced wheeze?

Viral induced wheeze is a wheeze/whistling sound coming from the chest caused by a viral infection (usually a cold). The virus makes the airways (breathing tubes) swollen and creates sticky mucus (phlegm) which can get stuck in the airway making it harder for air to move in and out. The wheezy noise is made because air is moving through the tight airway. It will get better as the cold gets better.

- The wheeze may return each time your child has a cold
- Usually your child is well in-between viral infections
- Children from six months to five years are more likely to be affected as their airways are smaller compared to older children and adults. Symptoms should improve as your child gets older and may disappear by about age six years.

## Does this mean my child has asthma?

- Viral induced wheeze is common affecting at least 50% of children under the age of six years at some point. Only around 1 in 11 children will go on to develop asthma
- Children with asthma are often wheezy even when they do not have a cough or cold
- Children with asthma often have a personal or family history of asthma and/or allergy.

Doctors and nurses may not officially 'label' a young child as having asthma as children with viral induced wheeze often 'grow out' of their symptoms by school age.

## What treatment will my child need?

The doctor or nurse may prescribe an inhaler called Salbutamol which is always given through a spacer. It is often referred to as the blue inhaler or '**reliever**' inhaler. This inhaler contains a medicine that will relax your child's airways and relieve the wheezy symptoms. Dosing advice is included in this leaflet.

Occasionally your doctor or nurse may prescribe another type of medication called a '**preventer**'. This can either be an inhaler that may be beige (Soprobec/Clenil), brown (Clenil), or grey with a pink cap that is (Soprobec). Both Soprobec and Clenil are the same medications. All preventative inhalers are to be taken every day in the morning and evening, even when your child is well. Another medication that your child may be prescribed is called Montelukast, this can either be in a chewable tablet or granule form.

Preventer medication is more often prescribed if your child has frequent symptoms of cough and wheeze or if they have symptoms in-between viral infections. Inhalers in this age group should **always** be given using a spacer device. Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist will show you how to use this correctly.

## What will I do if my child has a further wheezy episode?

During a cold your child should have their regular blue (salbutamol) inhaler. The recommended dose is **4** puffs **4** times per day for **4** days when symptoms are at their worst. This is not a course of treatment so can safely be reduced or stopped if symptoms settle down.

## What if my child develops a severe attack of wheezing or difficulty breathing?

You may notice your child's breathing is a real effort (e.g. chest, tummy or neck muscles pulling in with each breath). They may find it hard to eat and drink and may be irritable. They may find it hard to speak in a sentence. If this happens and the usual dose of blue inhaler is not helping, your child should have 1 puff (dose) of the blue inhaler through the spacer every minute for 10 minutes, 10 puffs in total. This is called an emergency dose. If the emergency dose of the blue inhaler is needed more than **twice** in any 24 hour period you must get medical advice.

## When should I take my child to see a doctor or nurse?

If there is no improvement after the emergency dose or if the symptoms return within 3 to 4 hours your child needs to be seen by a doctor or nurse practitioner either at the GP Surgery, Out of hours (call 111) or the Emergency Department as soon as possible. This might be during the day or at night time. You may also have a feeling that something is wrong with your child but it is hard to explain - don't ignore this feeling.

**Giving repeated emergency doses of the blue inhaler without medical review is not safe.**

If your child cannot talk, is gasping for breath or has colour change, you must **phone 999 for an ambulance** and continue to give 1 puff of the blue inhaler through the spacer every minute until help arrives.

It is important to have a plan in place just in case your child has a severe attack. You may need to think about what you would do if this happened at night time especially if you have other children and you are the only adult in the house.

## What else can I do to help my child?

### Second hand smoke exposure

Most of cigarette smoke doesn't go into your lungs- it goes into the air around you. If you or any one close to your child smokes, it is important that your child is not exposed to this as they will breathe it in. This involves removing all smoking from the family home or car.

We are not sure about the risks of exposure to vaping or e-cigarettes so it would be advisable to avoid using these around your child. We appreciate that it can be very difficult to stop smoking.

If you feel ready to stop, just beginning to think about it, or are looking for information you can contact **Quit Your Way Scotland** for free by phoning an advisor on 0800 84 84 84. Your local pharmacist is also able to offer help and advice.

### Healthy eating

It is important for children to eat healthily to make sure they are getting all the energy and nutrients they need to grow and develop properly. Growing children, especially fussy eaters, often don't get enough important vitamins. That's why the Department of Health recommends that all children aged six months to five years are given vitamin supplements containing vitamins A, C, and D every day. Having too much of some vitamins can be harmful to children so it is important to ask your health visitor or pharmacist for advice on which vitamins to give and where to get them.

## Further information is also available at:

[www.asthma.org.uk](http://www.asthma.org.uk)

Smoking - For more information on how to stop smoking in Lothian you can visit

[www.tinyurl.com/qywlothian](http://www.tinyurl.com/qywlothian)

Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com))- search for "Quit Your Way NHS Lothian"

Royal Hospital for Children and Young people  
50 Little France Crescent  
Edinburgh  
EH16 4TJ

