



Children's Health

Breathing Problems

HOW TO IDENTIFY THEM

WHEEZING

This is a high-pitched purring or whistling sound made when your child is breathing out. A muscle spasm in the airway makes breathing difficult. Wheezing can be caused by a respiratory infection, asthma, an allergic reaction, toxic fumes, foreign objects caught in the airway, a genetic disorder affecting the lungs or pneumonia. It's important to take your child to a doctor immediately to determine what's causing the wheezing.

ASTHMA

Asthma causes inflammation and obstruction of the airways. Breathing becomes difficult, resulting in panting, wheezing or whistling sounds accompanied with coughing and spitting up mucus. Keep your child away from secondhand tobacco smoke, strong odors and fumes, and keep him indoors when air pollution is high. If your child experiences an asthma attack for the first time, see a doctor immediately and learn what medications to use.

BRONCHITIS

This occurs most often after a cold or upper respiratory infection has not healed completely. A cough that brings up mucus, discomfort or tightness in the chest, low-grade fever and wheezing are symptoms of bronchitis. At home, increase fluid intake and keep your child away from smoke and pollutants. To aid breathing, provide moist air through a humidifier, hot shower or sink filled with hot water. Give your child acetaminophen for fever, and expectorant cough syrup for an unproductive cough. See a doctor immediately if your child is an infant, has difficulty breathing or has a cough that lasts longer than two weeks.

PNEUMONIA

This is an infection of the smallest air passages of the lungs which have filled with mucus or pus that prevents oxygen from reaching the blood. Pneumonia may follow or accompany a cold, flu or bronchitis. If your child experiences rapid or labored breathing, see a doctor immediately.

COUGHS

Coughing is the way the body tries to clear the airways

and lungs. Most coughs are caused by a viral infection, inhaling bits of food or other foreign objects or exposure to secondhand smoke.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF...

the cough lasts more than two weeks without relief.

your child coughs up green-, yellow- or rust-colored sputum.

your child is coughing up blood.

the coughing is accompanied by wheezing, shortness of breath, rapid breathing or fever, and lasts more than four days.

WHOOPIING COUGH (PERTUSSIS)

When your child coughs repeatedly five to 10 times without being able to take a breath, and when she does take a breath it makes a whooping sound, and coughing episodes are accompanied by fever and weight loss followed by vomiting, your child may have whooping cough. For relief of symptoms in older children, help them to sit up and lean forward during a coughing bout. A cool-mist humidifier may help loosen bronchial secretions and soothe the cough. Don't give cough medicine unless prescribed by your child's doctor. Whooping cough is most dangerous to infants. Immunizations are available beginning at 2 months of age.

CROUP

Croup is characterized by a cough that sounds like a barking seal and is accompanied by gasping for air. This condition can be frightening, but it's rarely dangerous. Croup is seen most often in children 3 months to 3 years of age. It generally lasts five to seven days and is worse at night. The dried and thickened mucus is relieved by steam and by breathing cool night air.

SEEK EMERGENCY CARE IF...

your child's breathing is labored and she can't swallow.

your child is drooling and gasping for air.

your child's lips and nails turn blue or dark in color.
