

Discharge Information Leaflet for Children with Wheeze

Your child has been seen in the Emergency Department or Children's assessment unit and the clinician has assessed that your child can be safely treated at home for their wheeze. This leaflet is to advise you about how to manage your child's breathing and to help you decide where and when to get further advice or assessment if needed. If your child has a bespoke asthma plan you should follow that instead.

How long will my child take to get better?

Wheezy episodes will usually take 5-7 days to fully resolve. Inhalers will only help with the breathing difficulty. Symptoms like cough and runny nose can't be treated and may continue for much longer.

How do I help my child's breathing?

The most important treatment is the blue (salbutamol) inhaler. If you have been told that your child has a viral wheeze this is the only treatment that they are likely to need. If your child has asthma you should continue to give your child their preventer inhaler and may also have been given steroid medicine.

The blue inhaler can be given as often as every four hours. If you feel that they are getting worse then it is safe to give the inhaler up to an hour sooner, but you need to get your child reassessed. (see "When should I worry?")

The inhaler should always be given through a spacer device. You should have been shown how to use this correctly. If the spacer has a mask this will only work if the mask is applied firmly to the child's face covering their mouth and nose.

When the spacer is applied correctly you will be able to see a valve moving back and forth when the child breathes. Shake the inhaler and you should feel liquid moving inside it. If you can't feel anything inside, it is empty and you need a new one. Put it in the spacer and press the button down fully to give a puff. Allow ten movements of the valve as your child breathes and then take the inhaler out to give it another shake before giving the next puff. (see video:)



How many puffs of the blue inhaler should I give and how often?

Your child only needs the blue inhaler if they have symptoms. Four hours or more after the last inhaler, if your child has any of the following:

- visible signs of difficulty breathing (skin sucking in in the neck or between the ribs, or breathing looks fast or hard)
- you can hear a wheeze
- they are saying that it feels difficult to breathe
- a reduced peak flow reading (if you use a peak flow meter)

give 2 puffs of the blue inhaler via your spacer, one puff at a time. After 5-10 minutes, if these symptoms have resolved, you do not need to give any more inhaler. If your child has not improved yet repeat this until you have given up to 10 puffs. See the next section for what to do if this is not working.

When should I worry?

Sometimes children with wheeze will get worse instead of slowly getting better. It is best to get medical advice or reassessment early when this happens. You will be able to tell that breathing is getting worse by how fast and difficult the breathing looks and by how much the skin is sucking in between or below their ribs and in the front of their neck. If your child's breathing looks worse despite giving the inhaler you should do something.

- If your child's breathing gets a lot worse over a short period of time you should give 10 puffs of the blue inhaler and go to the nearest emergency department.
- If they look dangerously unwell call 999 and give 10 puffs every 15 minutes until an ambulance arrives.
- If you have given 10 puffs of the blue inhaler and they still haven't completely returned to normal, you should try to see your GP as soon as possible or go to your nearest emergency department if you can't see your GP.
- If your child is responding well to the inhaler but you are noticing that they need the next lot of inhaler before 4 hours, you should try to see your GP as soon as possible or go to your nearest emergency department if you can't see your GP.
- If you think that your child's breathing is okay, but they are reluctant to drink then it is safe to give paracetamol or ibuprofen.

Where can I get help?

NHS 111 website or phone advice service

- If you feel that you can manage your child's illness, but you want advice about something (Your local pharmacist may also be able to help)
- If you are unsure about whether your child needs to be seen or needs medical treatment

Your GP or the NHS walk in centre

- If you have been advised to by 111
- If you feel that your child needs a medical assessment soon but is not an emergency

Go to your nearest Emergency Department or phone 999

- If your child has the significant features above
- If your instinct is that your child is dangerously unwell
- If you are advised to do so by 111 or your GP

After being sent home from hospital, you should make an appointment with your child's GP to be seen in about 2-3 days' time.

If there are any smokers living in the house this will make breathing problems worse. You should get advice about stopping smoking and can do that via this QR code:

