

Viral induced Wheeze

Information for parents and/or caregivers

What is Viral Induced Wheeze?

Viral induced wheeze is caused by a viral infection and often starts with a cough or a cold. It commonly occurs in children under the age of 3 years. Wheeze is a whistling sound heard when breathing out.

Why does it happen?

The viral infection may cause a narrowing of the small airways and /or increase mucus production in your child's lungs. Viral induced wheeze is more common in children under the age of 3 years as their airways are smaller. The wheeze may return each time your child has a cold and can occasionally last for some weeks.

Does this mean my child has asthma?

No, this does not mean your child has asthma. More than half the children with viral induced wheeze will grow out of it by preschool age when their airways have grown and developed. However, children with frequent viral induced wheeze may go on to develop asthma.

How can it be treated?

Wheeze often gets better with inhaled medication called bronchodilators. The medication is breathed in (inhaled), which your doctor may prescribe for your child and the nursing staff will monitor its effect.

Bronchodilators or relievers, E.g. Ventolin® or Asmol® (Salbutamol), are medications that assist in opening the airways, allowing air to move in and out of the lungs more easily.

Your child may also be given a short course of oral steroids, eg Redipred® prednisolone, to help reduce inflammation in the airway

Sometimes children with Viral Induced Wheeze need to have a short hospital stay.

Reasons for staying in hospital include:

- Difficulty breathing,
- Needing Ventolin® more often than every three hours
- Needing some extra oxygen
- Poor feeding

If hospitalisation is required, your child's condition will be monitored closely. Oxygen may be needed to support your child's breathing. Your child will need to remain in hospital until their oxygen levels are back to a satisfactory level and if using a bronchodilator more than every three hours.

Your child should be encouraged to eat and drink small frequent meals.

As viral induced wheeze is caused by a virus, antibiotics are not helpful.

When can I take my child home?

When the doctors and nurses are happy with your child's progress, and feel he/she is improving you will be discharged from hospital.

This is when they are no longer requiring any oxygen, are feeding well and you are able to manage them at home.

Do I need to continue treatment at home?

Your child may need to continue treatment with the reliever once they are sent home and you will be given a recovery plan and an action plan outlining how often and when to administer the treatment.

You will also be given training and education from staff before going home on how to administer the reliever using a puffer and spacer.

It is important that nobody smokes near your child. Cigarette smoke, even on clothing, can make children wheeze.

When to seek help?

If your child is still wheezy in between inhalers and looks unwell you should seek urgent medical attention.

Signs to look out for include

- Fast breathing rate
- Very fast heart beat
- Tummy sucking in with breathing
- Sucking in at the ribs when breathing
- Sucking in of throat
- Grunting noise when breathing out
- Agitation
- Breathlessness preventing speaking in sentences
- A scared, very quiet and tired child

Remember:

- Viral induced wheeze is a different condition to asthma.
- It is a viral infection so antibiotics will not help.
- The wheeze should resolve within a week, however the cough may last longer
- It is important that nobody smokes near your child as cigarette smoke, even on clothing can make children wheeze

If there is severe breathing difficulty, or if your child is distressed, contact your doctor or local hospital or call 000 for urgent ambulance assistance

For more information

- See your family doctor
- For 24 hour health advice call – Healthdirect Australia 1800 022 222
- Parent helpline 1300 364 100
- Local emergency department

Adapted from:

Viral Induced wheeze: the Sydney Children's hospital network: parent fact sheet

Managing Acute wheezing episodes in children 0-5: Australian asthma handbook: National Asthma Council of Australia (2017)

Virus induced wheezing & Asthma: An overview: Up to date (September,2016)

For more information

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