This clinical guideline has been developed to ensure appropriate diagnosis, evaluation, and treatment for otherwise healthy patients who are less than 2 years of age, presenting with a first episode of mild to moderate bronchiolitis. Please direct any questions to Dr. Jennifer Jewell, BBCH Pediatric Hospitalist, at 207-662-2541.

Bronchiolitis is a self-limited viral infection of the bronchioles, marked by edema but not smooth muscle contraction. Because the airway resistance is high in younger children, bronchiolitis is most common in patients less than 2 years of age. Viral etiologies include RSV, influenza, parainfluenza, bocavirus, metapneumovirus, and adenovirus; commonly, patients are infected with more than one virus. The treatment goal is to maintain hydration and oxygenation and to monitor for apnea and respiratory distress. A significant percentage of patients with bronchiolitis are diagnosed with asthma during childhood. The cause-effect relationship between asthma and bronchiolitis is unclear. The following are evidence-based recommendations.

**SIGNs AND SYMPTOMS OF BRONCHIOLITIS**

- URI symptoms: fever, cough, coryza
- Wheezing
- Respiratory Distress
- Poor feeding
- Apnea

**RISK FACTORS for SEVERE DISEASE**

- Less than 12 weeks of age
- Prematurity
- Cardiac Disease
- Pulmonary Disease
- Immunodeficiencies

**Evaluation:** in the clinical setting of mild/moderate bronchiolitis, evidence for the following diagnostic tests are as indicated:

- **BLOOD GAS:** not indicated
- **CHEST RADIOGRAPH:** not indicated
- **RSV WASH:** indicated for cohorting purposes only
- **CBC, BLOOD CULTURE, URINE CULTURE:** rarely indicated, especially in patients over 90 days of age

**Criteria for IPU Admission**

- Significant respiratory distress/hypoxia
- Difficulty feeding or dehydration
- Unclear diagnosis
- Social concerns (no phone access, transportation, etc.)

**Criteria for PICU Admission/Transfer**

- Severe respiratory distress
- Apnea
- \( PCO_2 > 50 \) torr on an ABG or a CBG

**TREATMENT**

The following treatment modalities are not indicated: **ORAL ANTIHISTAMINES, ORAL/NASAL DECONGESTANTS, ANTIBIOTICS, COOL MIST, CHEST PHYSIOTHERAPY, DEEP SUCTIONING OF THE NASOPHARYNX**

**OXYGEN** is indicated to maintain saturations > 90%. Apply oxygen only if saturations are persistently below 90%. Continuous monitoring is recommended if supplemental oxygen is required. If supplemental oxygen is not needed, Q4 hour oxygen saturation monitoring may be used. Consider maintaining higher oxygen saturations for patients with: fever, acidosis, hemoglobinopathy, chronic lung disease, significant cardiac disease, or prematurity.

**ALBUTEROL** is not indicated. If a patient has a strong family history of asthma or a component of bronchospasm, albuterol may be helpful. A trial of albuterol should be discontinued if no response is noted after an initial dose. Patients who respond to albuterol may have undiagnosed asthma.

**RACEMIC EPINEPHERINE** is not indicated.

**INHALED HYPERTONIC SALINE** may benefit some patients. The typical dose is 3-4 ml every 4-6 hours.

**STEROIDS** are not indicated.

**NASAL SALINE DROPS** and **FREQUENT NASAL SUCTIONING**, especially prior to feeding, is useful.

**RESPIRATORY MONITOR** and **OXYGEN SATURATION MONITOR** (if the patient requires supplemental oxygen) is appropriate for admitted patients.

**NGT FEEDS** are indicated if a patient is clinically dehydrated and unwilling to feed despite suctioning prior to feeding attempts, has a persistent RR > 80/minute, vomiting, decreased oxygen saturation to < 90% despite supplemental oxygen during feedings, or marked work of breathing during feeds.

**PO FEEDS** are recommended if patients are stable with RR < 80/minute. Thickening feeds with 1-2 teaspoons of cereal/ounce of formula or breast milk has been shown to decrease the risk of aspiration and is recommended. Continued breastfeeding should be encouraged.

**IV FLUIDS** are rarely required in mildly to moderately ill patients with bronchiolitis.
INFECTION CONTROL

INFECTION CONTROL MEASURES for hospitalized patients include standard and contact precautions (gowns and gloves). Placing patients with proven RSV in a room together is acceptable. Visitors with URI symptoms should be discouraged from visiting hospitalized patients, especially during the winter months. Attention to hand hygiene with alcohol-based gel should be emphasized for visitors, families, patients, and providers.

PREVENTION

Exposure to environmental tobacco smoke should be avoided. Caregivers who smoke should receive information about the importance of minimizing environmental smoke exposure to patients and offered smoking cessation counseling.

Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life should be encouraged. Breastfeeding decreases morbidity from respiratory infections.

Palivizumab may be indicated in certain patients with extreme prematurity or on-going medical illnesses.

REFERENCES


Algorithms are not intended to replace providers’ clinical judgment or to establish a single protocol. Some clinical problems may not be adequately addressed in this guideline. As always, clinicians are urged to document management strategies.

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