

Helping Hand™

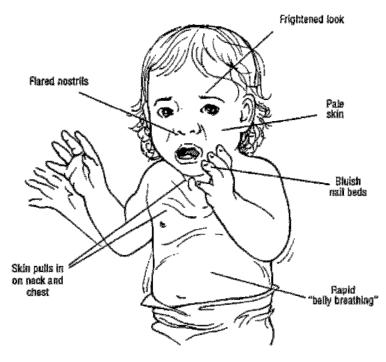
Respiratory Distress

Respiratory distress describes many of the symptoms related to breathing problems. There can be many causes of respiratory distress in children, but usually it's caused by infections, chronic illness or a blocked airway. The symptoms (listed below) mean your child is not getting enough oxygen to his lungs or is starting to get an infection. A child who was premature at birth or has been in the hospital for respiratory problems may have these problems.

When to Call the Doctor

Call 9-1-1 immediately if your child stops breathing or if you think your child's life is in danger. Call your child's doctor, call 9-1-1 or take your child to the nearest emergency room if you see **any** of these signs of respiratory distress (Picture 1):

- Pale or bluish skin color Check around your child's eyes, lips, hands and feet, especially the nail beds.
- Increased breathing rate Count your child's breaths for one minute. Is he or she breathing faster than usual when he is quiet?
- Retractions Check to see whether your child's chest pulls in with each breath, especially around the collarbone and around the ribs.
- Nasal flaring Check to see if your child's nostrils widen when he breathes in.
- Noisy breathing Listen for breathing that sounds like grunting, wheezing or like mucus is in the throat.



Picture 1 Some signs of respiratory distress.

When to Call the Doctor, continued

Call your doctor if you see any of the following signs:

- Cough.
- **Fever** Check your child's temperature to see if it is over 100°F. Take your child's temperature under the arm if he is an infant or young child; take it by mouth for children over 6 years old.
- Clammy skin Feel your child's skin to see if it is cool but also sweaty.
- **Mood change** Check to see if your child is more sleepy or fussy than usual or "just not acting like himself." Also check how well your child is eating, sleeping and playing.

These signs tell a lot about how a child is feeling. Have this information ready when you call the doctor. It will help the doctor decide what to do for your child.

What to Do if Your Child Is in Respiratory Distress

- Call your doctor or 9-1-1.
- Stay calm.
- Comfort and reassure your child.
- Place your child in a comfortable position (usually sitting up).

How to Prevent Respiratory Infections

Not all breathing problems can be avoided, but you can help prevent many respiratory infections by taking these steps:

- **Do not smoke around your child.** Children who are around smokers get twice as many respiratory infections, such as colds, as those who do not live with smokers. Do not smoke in the child's room, even when he is not there. Smoke residue can build up in the carpet, curtains and blankets. If you must smoke, it is best to smoke outdoors.
- Keep your child's room free of dust.
- Do not use baby powder or cornstarch on your child. These things can irritate a baby's lungs.
- It is important for all family members to practice good hand washing to prevent the spread of germs in your home.
- If possible keep your child away from people who are sick.

Other Important Information

It is important to **post emergency phone numbers by every phone**, including the police, rescue squad and fire department. You may be taught cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) while your child is at Nationwide Children's Hospital. If so, be sure to post the steps of CPR. If you are not taught CPR at Nationwide Children's Hospital, classes are available in the community.

If you have any questions, please ask your doctor or nurse or call ______.