What is Viral Wheeze?

Viruses are common infections that cause symptoms of a cold. Viruses can also irritate the breathing tubes in the lungs making them swell – this makes the breathing space smaller. When this happens it may make it harder for your child to breathe. You may hear a whistling noise when they breathe out, this is called a wheeze.

Can I prevent it?

You can't stop your child catching a virus. Inhalers with spacers, like the ones used for asthma can help to manage your child's symptoms.
Your child may be prescribed a blue inhaler called Salbutamol, to be used with a spacer. This relaxes the muscles around the breathing tubes, opening them up, making it easier for your child to breathe.
It is important that your child always uses the spacer otherwise they won't get the inhaler medicine to the right place.
If you smoke, try to stop as cigarette smoke irritates the airways and makes wheezing worse.
Antibiotics will not help a viral infection.

Is it asthma?

Most children with viral wheeze usually grow out of it and it doesn't develop into asthma. A small number of children with viral wheeze will go on to develop asthma but this is much less common.

How can I treat Viral Wheeze?

- Follow the wheeze plan as soon as you think your child is starting to get a cold
- It is important that you use a spacer to administer the inhaler and use the correct technique
- Shake the inhaler well and put it in the hole at the end of the spacer
- Place the mask over your child's nose and mouth
- Press the inhaler once to release a "puff". Encourage your child to breathe in and out at a normal rate 5 times – you will see the valve on the spacer moving
- Repeat this until the required number of puffs have been given
- Do not force your child – if they are crying the inhaler will not be effective
- Ask your nurse for advice if giving your child their inhaler is difficult – make it fun with silly songs / games
- It is important to let your child rest and ensure they drink plenty of fluids

Scan this QR code to watch a video on how to give an inhaler to a younger child:

Remember to take your empty inhalers back to the pharmacy for safe disposal.

This leaflet is intended for colour printing.
Nov 2026. Author: BeatAsthma

Date

Trust/GP surgery logo here

Wheeze Management Plan For

Name

My nurse/doctor's name and contact details are:

My inhalers/medicines are:



Please use this if your child starts to get wheezy or short of breath.

Green Zone
Getting a cold

Your child has:

- a cold (runny nose, coughing, sneezing)
- a mild wheeze
- shortness of breath

but they are still able to do their normal day to day activities such as going to nursery/ school.

Green Zone Action

- Give two puffs of their salbutamol (blue) inhaler through a spacer up to four hourly using the technique described on the back of this page.
- You can do this for a few days but if your child is not getting better, **make an appointment to see a doctor.**

IMPORTANT:

If after two puffs your child still has increasing wheeze or chest tightness

Move to the AMBER ZONE

Amber Zone:
Getting Unwell

Your child still has symptoms after two puffs of salbutamol or has more symptoms, for example:

- out of breath
- coughing
- wheezing
- doesn't feel able to run around and play as usual.

Amber Zone Action

- Give two puffs of their blue inhaler using the technique described on the back of this page and wait ten minutes.
- If they still have symptoms after this, you can repeat the two puffs every ten minutes up to a total of six puffs as often as every four hours as needed.
- If your child is needing six puffs as often as every four hours, keep going, but you must see a doctor **within the next 24 hours**. This can be your GP or your local out of hours service

IMPORTANT:

If after six puffs your child still has increasing wheeze or chest tightness

Move to the RED ZONE

Red Zone:
Severe

Your child seems very unwell

- They still have symptoms after six puffs of their blue inhaler, or they need their blue inhaler more than every four hours
- They are not getting better, and you need to take action now.
- Give up to ten puffs of the blue inhaler via a spacer, one puff at a time.

AND

- Arrange an urgent review with their doctor **today or** go to the emergency department if this is not possible.

If your child needs ten puffs of the blue inhaler again, you should get **an urgent review within the next few hours**

If your child is:

- Breathing fast
- Struggling or using a lot of effort to breathe - the skin between the ribs or neck sucking inwards
- Getting tired
- Unable to talk in a sentence / grunting /panting
- Pale/grey/blue around lips or face

You should call 999
AND
Whilst waiting for the ambulance, use the spacer to give one puff of their blue inhaler every 30 seconds, taking 5 breaths /20 seconds for every puff given.