

Understanding Tracheitis in Your Child with a Trach

Children with trach tubes are at high risk for respiratory infection. It is important to contact your doctor if your child shows signs of tracheitis.

What is tracheitis?

Tracheitis is an infection of the trachea, the upper airway below the vocal cords, commonly known as the “windpipe.”

The infection causes inflammation (redness and swelling) of the upper airway, increased mucus and a change in the color or smell of the mucus.

What causes tracheitis?

Tracheitis can be caused by either a virus or by bacteria. Your child may develop signs of tracheitis during or after a cold.

How is tracheitis treated?

It depends on the cause. If your doctor thinks the tracheitis is from a virus, no antibiotics will be prescribed, because they have no effect on viruses. Support your child with increased suctioning and maintaining an open airway as the tracheitis resolves on its own over time.

If the tracheitis is thought to be a bacterial infection, then your doctor will prescribe an antibiotic, either by mouth or inhaled. Tobramycin, or “Tobi,” is one type of inhaled antibiotic often prescribed. It can be given directly through the tracheostomy tube with a nebulizer and a resuscitator bag, to deliver medicine directly to the infected area of the trachea.

If your child has symptoms of tracheitis, contact your healthcare provider right away. You may be asked to bring a sample of the secretions to a laboratory to check for signs of an active infection. There are always some bacteria living inside a trach tube, but they increase in number when a child has tracheitis, as does the number of white blood cells.

How will I know my child has tracheitis?

Your child will develop symptoms that can include:

- Fever of 101.5 F or above
- Frequent and strong coughing
- Change of color, thickness and odor of the trach secretions (mucus)
- A need to suction more often

To Learn More

- Respiratory Care
206-987-2258
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- www.seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

Symptoms that suggest a worsening infection include:

- Fever lasting longer than 2 or 3 days
- Increased breathing effort
- Faster breathing
- Retractions (skin sucks in between neck and ribs during work of breathing)
- Nasal flaring
- Increased oxygen requirement
- Noisy breathing
- Infants may have difficulty feeding and/or they may vomit due to excessive coughing

How can I keep my child from getting tracheitis?

Prevention is key.

- Always wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or with gel for 15 seconds before caring for your child, especially if other members of the home have a cold. Viral illnesses can spread when handwashing is not properly done or when it is forgotten.
- Wear gloves when suctioning or doing stoma care.
- Keep your child away from other children with cold symptoms.
- Avoid bringing your child to activities that involve crowds; and avoid close contact with other children or anyone with fever, runny nose or cough, especially during the winter/viral season.
- Encourage hand washing by all family members and anyone else before touching your child.
- Cover your mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing. Quickly throw away used tissue and wash your hands.

Despite your best efforts, your child will get a cold which may develop into a viral or bacterial tracheitis. By recognizing symptoms early and calling your healthcare provider, and keeping extra mucus out of your child's airway, you will support a quick recovery.