Acute bronchitis is an illness that affects the bronchial tubes, or airways. In this handout, you will learn about acute bronchitis and its symptoms. You will also learn how doctors diagnose and treat acute bronchitis.

WHAT IS ACUTE BRONCHITIS?
Acute bronchitis, or simply bronchitis, is a condition in which the bronchial tubes (airways) become swollen and inflamed. The swelling and inflammation can make it harder to breathe. It is called acute bronchitis because the illness lasts only a few weeks.

WHAT CAUSES ACUTE BRONCHITIS?
Viruses (a certain type of germ) are the most common cause of acute bronchitis. Other causes include:

- Bacteria
- Fungal (fungus) infections
- Spending time around things that can bother your airways, such as dust, chemicals or smoke

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF ACUTE BRONCHITIS?
Symptoms of acute bronchitis usually last about 2-3 weeks. Symptoms can also look similar to other illnesses, like a cold or the flu.

Common symptoms include:

- Cough with yellow or green phlegm (mucus)
- Shortness of breath or wheezing (a whistling sound when you breathe in)
- Fever or chills
- Body or muscle aches
- Sore throat

HOW DO DOCTORS TEST FOR ACUTE BRONCHITIS?
- Physical exam
- Review of your child’s medical history
- Chest X-ray
- Pulse oximetry (a test that measures how much oxygen is in your child’s blood)
- Test of the mucus from the lungs or nose

HOW DO DOCTORS TREAT ACUTE BRONCHITIS?
Treatment depends on your child’s symptoms and age. If your child’s acute bronchitis is caused by a virus, he should get better on his own with rest and fluids. The doctor will talk with you about which treatments are right for your child.

In most cases, antibiotics will not help your child feel better. Acute bronchitis is usually caused by a virus. Antibiotics kill bacteria, but not viruses.

WHEN SHOULD I CALL THE DOCTOR?
Call the doctor if your child’s symptoms do not get better after 2-3 weeks or if his symptoms get worse.

What is the difference between viruses and bacteria?

Bacteria can live in many different types of environments. There are good bacteria and bad bacteria. Infections caused by bad bacteria often get better with antibiotics.

Viruses are germs that multiply once a small number of virus germs enter your body. Infections caused by viruses do not usually get better with antibiotics.