

What is respiratory distress?

Respiratory distress is another term for breathing problems. It means your child is not breathing well or getting enough oxygen.

What are the signs of respiratory distress?

Check your child often for breathing problems. Your child may have respiratory distress if they:

- **Seems breathless or short of breath** – some signs include:
 - Have a weak voice
 - Cannot cry loudly
 - Have a hoarse cry or voice
 - Cannot suck on a bottle
 - Cannot finish long sentences
- **Is pale, blue or purple** – you may see this in their face, lips, gums or nails
- **Is working hard to breathe** – some signs include:
 - Retractions – retractions are when the skin “pulls in” between the ribs, below the ribs or in the neck.
 - Grunts or wheezes
 - Strained breathing
 - Seems to be using a lot of energy to breathe
 - Head bobbing
 - Flaring nostrils
 - Heavy breathing
- **Seems tired, restless or fussy**
- **Is breathing faster than normal** – see normal rates below.

What are normal breathing rates?

Talk with the doctor about your child’s normal breathing rate. It may vary at times.

Check your child’s breathing rate when they are resting or sleeping. Do not check it when they are crying or upset. **Normal breathing rates are:**

Newborn to 1 year old	30 to 40 breaths* every minute
1 year to 8 years old	24 to 30 breaths* every minute
9 years and older	16 to 22 breaths* every minute

***1 breath counts as breathing in and out**

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Respiratory distress, continued

When should I call my child's doctor?

Call the doctor if your child:

- Has mucus that is yellow or green.
- Has mucus that smells bad.
- Has a temperature of 100.4°F or higher.

Also call if you have any questions or concerns about how your child looks or feels.

When should I call 911?

Call 911 **right away** if your child has any of these:

- Is so tired and weak that they hardly respond to you
- Cannot breathe or is working very hard to breathe. Some signs include:
 - Grunts when they breathe
 - The skin pulls in around the ribs and chest when your child breathes
 - Your child's lips, gums or nails are blue or purple
 - They stop breathing for more than 10 seconds
 - They cannot talk when breathing

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

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