

What is Paediatric Physiotherapy?

Paediatric physiotherapists treat babies, children and young people from birth to 19 years of age. They have experience in child development and work with children with disabilities.

We understand that it is important to work with the child, their family and carers to help keep the hospital stay as short as possible.

Why might my child need chest physiotherapy whilst in hospital?

If children have difficulty breathing due to problems with their lungs, physiotherapy may help to clear secretions (mucus) to make it easier to breathe.

Conditions where your child may experience difficulty clearing secretions may include:

- Lower respiratory tract infection / pneumonia / chest infection
- Infective exacerbation of asthma
- Cystic fibrosis
- Conditions where pain may cause difficulty breathing and / or coughing

(i.e.) after abdominal surgery or broken ribs.

The physiotherapists will assess your child and take into consideration the:

- age
- clinical signs and symptoms of your child.

Physiotherapy treatment is based upon an assessment of your child's needs, which leads to the development of an individual treatment programme which will include how frequently your child requires physiotherapy, which may change from day to day.

Will a child be seen without his / her parent present?

Physiotherapists will always try to gain consent from you before assessing or treating your child. However, sometimes this is not always possible if you are not present and your child needs to be seen at short notice. The physiotherapist will try to contact a parent via telephone but this is not always possible. In these cases, the physiotherapist will gain consent from the child if appropriate due to their age and level of understanding (i.e. understands enough to be made fully aware of what will happen to them and what will be asked of them).

The physiotherapist will also make sure that the nurse and / or Doctor looking after your child is aware of the physiotherapy involvement at that time.

What type of treatments may my child receive?

Your physiotherapist will explain the physiotherapy treatment they feel is best for your child once they have completed their assessment. The most common treatments which are used with children who need chest physiotherapy include:

- Breathing exercises
- Positioning
- Percussion (gentle pats on the chest to help loosen and move secretions in the lungs)
- Vibrations (vibs) (gentle shakes applied to the chest to help loosen and move secretions in the lungs)
- Blowing games
- Activity and play

All of these treatments aim to work together to:

- Move the secretions upwards so your child can cough them out
- Improve your child's breathing
- Maintain or increase your child's ability to play or exercise comfortably

What happens when my child is discharged home from hospital?

If your child is well enough to be discharged home from hospital after a chest infection, it is unlikely that you will need to continue with chest physiotherapy. However, if it is felt to be of benefit, your physiotherapist may advise you and/or your child (depending on their age and level of understanding) how to continue with certain aspects of chest physiotherapy at home, such as:

- Independent breathing exercises
- Maintaining or increasing levels of activity / play
- Teaching you positioning and percussion

It is likely you will then be discharged from the care of your physiotherapist. You may be given a follow up clinic appointment with your consultant after your discharge home. If your child is continuing to experience problems with their chest, your consultant may refer you to another physiotherapist who will see you in the home or out-patient setting, if it is felt chest physiotherapy may be able to help further.

References

Association of Paediatric Chartered Physiotherapists. Physiotherapy for Children; Fit for Play: Fit for Life.