



What is BPD?

BPD is a condition that develops after an infant is born prematurely. When that happens, an infant's lungs are not fully developed, and this can cause breathing problems. Though many babies born prematurely do not develop BPD, it is still a common issue among many premature babies – it occurs in about 1/3rd of infants born under 32 weeks of pregnancy.

Though many infants need support with breathing for a few days after birth, infants with BPD typically need extra support for much longer. This support can be in the form of:

- Supplemental (extra) oxygen
- Pressurized air
- A ventilator (where a machine and breathing tube needs to be used to help an infant breathe)

When infants need breathing support for a long time, it is more likely that they will develop BPD.

How do we make this diagnosis?

The “official” diagnosis is made about 4 weeks before the mother's original due date, no matter how early the baby is born. So, if a baby is born at 28 weeks (12 weeks early) the diagnosis will be made when the baby is 8 weeks old.

There is no test to determine that your baby has BPD. We make this diagnosis based on how much breathing support your baby is requiring 4 weeks before their original due date. Sometimes we are concerned about a baby developing BPD earlier. We classify all infants who need CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure) or a ventilator as having more significant/severe BPD.





PATIENT AND FAMILY EDUCATION

Why did my baby develop BPD?

When babies are born early, their lungs are not fully developed. Their lungs will continue to develop and grow for many years after birth. Unfortunately, at the time of premature birth, the air spaces (called alveoli) and airways in the lungs are too few. Babies then need to breathe faster, and sometimes harder, to make up for this; and many infants end up needing life-saving support to breathe, like mechanical ventilation. However, over time, the alveoli and airways can become injured from the ventilator and from the inhaled oxygen, leading to development of BPD. There may be other reasons why your baby developed BPD, but this is not anything you or the medical team could have prevented.

What do we do now that my baby has BPD?

BPD is not easy to prevent or treat, and there are several things we need to think about. There are some frequent problems that go along with BPD, and some babies develop more problems than others. Also, the outcomes for BPD are different from baby to baby, but we do have some ways to screen for additional problems and try to “predict” what may happen.

In the next chapter, we will explain what our BPD Program does, and start talking about some common problems that go along with BPD.