Spirometry:
a guide for parents and carers



What is spirometry?

Spirometry is a breathing test that shows how well a person's lungs are working. It uses a machine to measure how much and how fast someone can blow air out of their lungs. The machine is called a spirometer.

Why does my child need the test?

Spirometry is used to check if a child has asthma and how well their asthma is being controlled. The results help your child's doctor plan the right treatment for them. They may have the test again later to check how well their lungs are working over time and whether their treatment is helping.

What happens in a spirometry test?

Most children aged 6 years or older can do the test.

A spirometry test for a child takes about 30-40 minutes.

In the test:

- They will blow into a tube connected to a machine.
- They will take a deep breath then blow out as hard as they can, for as long as they can.
- Your child will do this several times to check that the readings are similar each time.
- Your child may be given a short-acting reliever inhaler, such as Ventolin (salbutamol), during the test. The test is then repeated to see if their breathing improves.

Don't worry if they can't do it on their first go. They may need to try again in the future.

What happens after the test?

Your child can return to their normal activities straight after the test and use their inhaler(s) as usual.

The doctor or nurse will discuss the results of the test with you. This may happen when the test finishes, or at a later appointment. They will explain what the results mean for your child's lung health and treatment. You can also ask for a copy of your child's results and add them to My Health Record. Depending on the results, your doctor or nurse may recommend other breathing tests or refer your child to a lung specialist.

Are there any side effects to the test?

Spirometry is not difficult or painful, but it does require some effort. Your child will need to take big breaths and blow out hard. Your child may feel tired or dizzy during, or just after, the test. This is normal and usually passes quickly.

How much will it cost?

Spirometry is usually low cost. Some clinics bulk bill, which means you do not pay anything. Other clinics charge a fee, and Medicare may pay some of the cost back. If the test is done at a hospital clinic, and your child has Medicare, the test is usually free. Before your appointment, ask the clinic how much the test will cost and how much money you can get back from Medicare.

Getting your child ready for spirometry



What to bring:
Any medicines or inhalers your child uses. If they use a spacer, bring that too.



What to wear:
Loose, comfortable clothing.



2 hours before:
Make sure your child does not eat a large meal.



1 hour before:
Make sure your child does not do activities that make them feel out of breath.



Ask your child to blow up balloons to practise for the test.



Some asthma inhalers need to be stopped before the test. Check with your doctor or clinic about which of your child's inhalers need to be stopped and when to stop them.
If your child needs to use their reliever inhaler before the test, let the healthcare professional performing the test know.



Tell your doctor if your child has had a **fever**, **chest infection**, or **symptoms of a cold or flu**. Being unwell can make it harder to do the breathing test. If your child is sick, the test may need to be delayed.

For more information:

Lung Foundation Australia
Lung Health Helpline 1800 654 301
www.lungfoundation.com.au

Asthma Australia
1800 ASTHMA Helpline 1800 278 462
www.asthmaaustralia.org.au

National Asthma Council Australia
www.nationalasthma.org.au

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