

Spirometry Tests for Children

Spirometry is a test that measures how well your child can move air in and out of the lungs.

It can check for breathing problems and show how well the lungs are working.

Doctors often use spirometry to diagnose and monitor lung problems, like asthma.

Most of the time, it's only used for children who are around age 5 and older.

Before the test, tell the doctor if your child takes any medicines for a lung problem.

Your child may need to stop taking certain ones until after the test.

Be sure your child doesn't eat a big meal right before the test.

Having a full stomach can keep the lungs from fully expanding.

And don't let your child do any hard exercise for a few hours before the test.

Spirometry can be done in a doctor's office or the hospital.

Here's how it works.

Your child will wear a nose clip to keep air from passing through the nose during the test, so the test is more accurate.

Your child will put their mouth on a small mouthpiece attached to a device called a spirometer and then breathe in as deeply as possible.

Then your child will blow out as hard and fast as they can— emptying the air from their lungs as much as possible.

The spirometer records the results.

The test may be repeated after your child breathes in, or inhales, medicine that opens the airways in the lungs.

If these first tests have normal results, your child may repeat the test again after taking medicine that constricts, or narrows, the airways— or after exercising, or breathing cold air, or breathing in an allergen or irritant that may be causing symptoms.

These "challenge tests," as they're called, are only done if the doctor needs more information to diagnose asthma.

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Spirometry usually takes around 5 to 30 minutes, depending on how many tests are done.

The tests aren't painful.

But your child may cough or feel lightheaded after breathing in or out quickly.

And the challenge tests may cause symptoms, like trouble breathing.

Your child will have a chance to rest between tests.

If your child is going to have a spirometry test, it might help to let them know what to expect.

Remind your child that the test doesn't hurt, and that it's over quickly.

And be sure to talk to your child's doctor if you have any concerns about the test.