



Croup

What is Croup?

Croup, also known as laryngotracheobronchitis, is a viral infection of the upper airways that causes swelling in the throat and surrounding tissues. It is caused by many viruses, including influenza A and B, respiratory syncytial virus, coxsackievirus A and B and human parainfluenza virus (HPIV), types 1 to 4. HPIV-1 is the leading cause of croup in children.

Croup usually occurs in children between six months and five to six years of age. Once a child has had croup, they are more likely to get it again. However, children usually do not get croup once they are 10 years of age and over. Croup commonly occurs in the late fall and late spring. In most cases, it develops quickly, peaks over three to five days, and clears up in four to seven days.

Symptoms of Croup

Before a child develops croup, they may have a sore throat, fever, red eyes or a runny nose. Symptoms may include a:

- barking, hacking cough that is often described as being similar to the call of a seal or sea lion and is the result of swelling around the vocal cords and windpipe
- hoarse voice
- “crowing” noise as the child breathes in

These symptoms may be mild, moderate, or severe and are often worse at night. Some children become so ill that they may need to be treated in the hospital.

How Croup spreads

The virus can spread through respiratory droplets that spread in the air when a sick person coughs or sneezes or from one sick person to another through touch. A sick person infects their hands by touching their eyes, nose or mouth and spreads the virus to others through touch.

A person with croup is contagious shortly before symptoms begin and for the length of the illness.

Treating Croup

Humidification (moisture or dampness in the air) may help soothe the airway by breaking up the congestion so the child may breathe easier. Acetaminophen or ibuprofen may be given to reduce chest discomfort or

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fever. Steroid medications, adrenaline and oxygen are routinely given in the hospital to treat moderate to severe cases of croup. Antibiotics are not given because it is a viral infection. In addition, antihistamines and decongestants do not help someone with croup.

Treating Croup at Home

Most children with mild croup can be treated at home, including:

- Sitting the child up in bed to allow them to breathe more easily.
- Staying calm. Comfort or distract your child, such as cuddling, reading a book or playing a quiet game. Crying makes breathing more difficult.
- Encouraging plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.
- Encouraging rest. Sleep can help your child fight the infection.
- Avoiding heavy meals because coughing may provoke vomiting.
- Dressing your child appropriately and take them into the cool air, or slightly open the child's window for 15 to 20 minutes to let the cool air in. Cool air may help decrease swelling in their throat so they may breathe easier.
- Having the child breathe moist and humidified air. This adds moisture to the throat that will decrease the thickness of mucus secretions to help clear the airway. Humidified air can be provided by:
 - Having your child breathe through a warm, wet washcloth placed over the nose and mouth.
 - Running hot water in your shower with the bathroom door closed. Once the room has become steamy or has fogged up, sit the child in the room for approximately 10 minutes.

NOTE: To avoid scalding or burning, do not place your child directly in front of steam. Children should be supervised at all times.

Seek medical attention if your child develops any of the following symptoms:

- Fever of 102° F (39°C) or higher
- Problems swallowing
- Rapid breathing
- Drooling (new or increased)
- Difficulty breathing
- Blueness around the mouth, nose and nails
- Restlessness
- Inability to speak
- A severe sore throat
- Discomfort when lying down

Preventing Croup

The best prevention is hand washing and avoid sharing items such as cups, glasses and utensils with an infected person.

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