

Croup in Children

Child Health Information

Croup is an illness which causes swelling of the voice box (larynx). It causes barking type of cough and noisy breathing. It is quite a common condition in young children.

It is usually caused by a virus, particularly one called 'parainfluenza'. Most of the time it will get better by itself but some children need hospital care.



What are the symptoms?

- Croup usually starts with a runny nose and mild temperature
- A sore throat and barking cough then develop
- The cough is often described as sounding like a seal
- Breathing is more noisy than usual, particularly when taking a breath in (this is called 'stridor')
- Often the cough and noisy breathing come on very suddenly during the night
- Sometimes it can be hard for the child to breathe. They may find it hard to talk and have drawing in of the muscles around the ribs and in the neck ('recession')
- Croup usually lasts 1-3 days.

How can you help when your child has croup?

- Try your best to stay calm – children can become distressed with croup and crying and anxiety can make their breathing worse
- Sit the child upright if their breathing is noisy or difficult. Let the child find a comfortable position
- Encourage your child to drink
- A cool environment such as taking your child outside for a brief time may help
- If your baby has a temperature, you can give them paracetamol (eg Calpol[®]) or ibuprofen. Make sure you read the instruction label carefully. A high temperature can make the breathing faster and the child feel more unwell
- Keep your child away from tobacco smoke.

When to seek medical advice

- If your child is finding it very difficult to breathe normally
- If your child looks very pale or blue
- If your child has in-drawing of the chest and is finding it hard to breath or talk
- If your child is finding it hard to swallow
- OR If you are worried about your child.

If at any time you are very concerned about your child call 111 for advice or 999 for an ambulance.

Things not to do:

Steam used to be advised as a treatment however it is not clear that it makes any difference. Children have been scalded by the hot water or steam given for croup so it is not recommended.

Do not make a child with breathing difficulty from croup lie down if they do not want to as it may make the breathing worse.

What happens if your child has to stay in hospital?

- You will be able to stay with your child
- We will do regular measurements of breathing and heart rate
- Sometimes we need to give some oxygen to your child, this is usually using a clear plastic mask or by fine tubes that go into the nose
- Steroid medicine is given by mouth or a nebuliser to reduce the swelling in the airways
- Severe croup may need other nebulisers and sometimes investigations such as X-rays to look for other causes
- A very small number of children admitted to hospital become seriously unwell with croup and need help to breathe on a machine until their condition gets better.

If my child is admitted how long will the hospital stay be?

Your child will often be able to go home the next morning after admission. Some children will need to stay one or two nights longer. Your child may still have some croup symptoms the night after you go home but this is usually milder if steroid medicines have been given.

Are there long term effects?

- Children usually make a complete recovery and have no long term problems
- Some children will get further bouts of croup when they have colds or other viral illnesses
- A few children get fairly frequent bouts of croup even without a cold. This can particularly occur in children who have lots of allergies or asthma
- Your child can go back to nursery or school as soon as they seem better
- Children do not normally need a check-up appointment after croup but contact your GP if you are concerned about their progress.

Further information

Your GP, hospital doctor, or health visitor will be happy to give further advice.

NHS choices website: <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/croup>