

Let's Talk About...

Croup

What is Croup?

Croup is a type of infection in the upper part of the lungs. Croup can cause symptoms in the voice box, vocal cords, and windpipe. These types of infections are more serious in infants and small children because they have smaller airways than adults.

What causes croup?

Children can get croup if they come in contact with another person's mucus (for example: a sneeze, used tissues, touching hands with someone who has not washed their hands). The illness usually begins 2 to 3 days after coming into contact with the virus.

What are symptoms of croup?

Children with croup can have the following symptoms:

- A “barky” cough (sounds like a dog or seal bark), noisy breathing, and sometimes heavy movement of the chest when breathing.
- The cough may be bad enough to cause gagging or vomiting.
- They may have a runny nose, fever, or both.
- Some infants are quite fussy, sleepy, and may not eat well.
- Croup may begin suddenly and is generally worse at night. The worst part of the illness lasts 2 to 3 days, but your child may have a cough for 2 weeks or more.



How is croup treated?

Humidity (moist air) and cool air are the most important treatments for croup. Some ways to provide cool air and mist or humidity are:

- If it is cool outside, wrap your baby in blankets or dress your child in warm clothes and take them outside. Cool or cold air will decrease swelling of the airways. This usually takes at least 15 minutes in cool night air.
- Use a cool-mist humidifier in your child's room
- Mist up the bathroom with hot shower steam and have your child sit in the bathroom for 10 minutes. You can cuddle with your child and read a story to keep them calm.

Offer your child Popsicles or cold drinks if they are old enough. This will soothe your child's throat and help reduce swelling.

Other ways to help your child feel more comfortable include:

- Sitting instead of lying down. Do not force your child to lie down if they are more comfortable sitting up. Your child will usually sit in a position that makes breathing easy.
- Giving your child acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) for a temperature more than 101° F (38.3° C), or to treat throat pain. **Children less than 6 months old should not use ibuprofen but can use acetaminophen.**

Do not give your child aspirin. Aspirin can cause brain, liver, and kidney damage, and may cause Reye's syndrome in children.

If your child's croup is bad, your doctor may tell you to take them to the emergency department (ED). There, your child will likely be given a medicine by mouth (a steroid anti-inflammatory) to help open the airway. Your child may also need a breathing treatment. In some cases, your child may also need oxygen or IV fluids (fluids given through a tiny tube into a vein).

Are there complications from croup?

The most common complications of croup are **ear infections** and **pneumonia** (a lung infection that makes it difficult to breathe). The most serious complication is complete blockage of breathing. This is rare, but you need to get help right away if you are worried about your child's breathing. This could be life threatening.

When should I call my child's doctor?

Call your child's doctor if they:

- Are having a hard time swallowing or has drooling that is not related to teething.
- Complain of an earache or, if your child is an infant, pull on their ears.
- Are having a fever lasting more than 5 days, or if they are having a continued high fever above 104° F (40° C). You should call your doctor for any fever over 100.4° F (38° C) if your child is less than 3 months old.

Take your child to the nearest hospital if they:

- Are having trouble breathing or have to suck hard with each breath.
- Don't have enough energy to eat, talk, or do simple tasks.
- Won't swallow or lie down.
- Have a bluish tint to their lips or face.

Call 911 right away if your child is severely distressed or cannot breathe.

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