

# Let's Talk About...

## Croup

Croup is a type of respiratory infection (upper respiratory infection). Croup can affect the voice box, vocal cords, and the windpipe. These infections are more serious in infants and small children because these children have smaller airways than adults.

### What happens in 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 have poor appetites.
- Croup may begin suddenly and is generally worse at night. The worst part of the illness lasts 2–3 days, but your child may have a wet cough for upwards of 2 weeks.

### How does a child get croup?

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

### How do you treat croup?

- Humidity and cool air are the most important treatments for croup. Some ways to provide cool air and mist 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.
- If your child is not in severe distress and is old enough to eat them, offer them Popsicles® or cold drinks. This will soothe our child's throat and help reduce swelling.
- Your child may feel more comfortable sitting up, if so, do not force them to lie down. Your child will usually sit in a position that makes breathing easy.
- You can give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol®) for a temperature more than 101°F (38.3°C).
- Do not give your child aspirin. Aspirin can cause brain, liver, and kidney damage and Reye's syndrome in children.
- If your child's croup is bad, your doctor may tell you to take them to the hospital. In the emergency department (ED), your child will receive treatments to open the airway. Your child may receive oxygen or IV fluids (fluids given through a tiny tube into a vein) if needed. In the ED, the doctor will decide if your child needs to be admitted to the hospital. The length of time in the hospital depends on how long your child needs oxygen, IV fluids, or other treatments.

### Are there complications from croup?

The most common complications of croup are ear infections and pneumonia. 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.

## Call your doctor if...

- Your child has a hard time swallowing or is drooling, not related to teething.
- Your child is restless and can't sleep due to difficulty breathing.
- Your child complains of an earache or, in an infant, if they pull their ears.
- Your child has a prolonged fever or if the temperature goes above 104°F (40°C) or 102°F (38.5°C) in infants.

## Go to the nearest hospital if your child...

- Does not have enough energy to eat, talk, or do simple tasks.
- Refuses to swallow or lie down.
- Has a bluish color on his lips or face.
- Sucks in severely with each breath.
- Has noisy breathing at rest.
- Is having trouble breathing
- Experiences severe distress or cannot breath, call 911.