

Let's Talk About...

Croup is a general term for an infection of the upper respiratory tract. Croup can affect the voice box, vocal cords, and the windpipe. These infections are more serious in infants and small children because they have smaller airways than adults.

What happens?

Your child can catch croup if he comes in contact with another person's mucus (a sneeze, used tissues, touching hands if the person has not washed their hands, etc.). The illness usually begins 2-3 days after being exposed to the virus. Croup may begin suddenly and is generally worse at night.

Usually children will have a "barky" cough (sounds like a dog or seal bark), noisy breathing, and occasionally heavy movement of the chest wall when breathing. They may also have a runny nose and/or fever. The cough may be bad enough to cause gagging or vomiting. Some infants with croup are also quite fussy, sleepy, and have poor appetites.

The worst of the illness lasts 2 to 3 days. But a wet cough may hang on for another week or two.

How do you treat croup?

Humidity and cool air are the most important treatments for croup. Some ways of providing these are:

- 1** If the outside air is cool, wrap your baby in blankets or dress your child in warm clothes and take him outside. Cool or cold air will lower swelling—it usually takes at least 15 minutes in the cool night air.
- 2** Use a cool-mist humidifier in your child's room.

Croup

- 3** Mist up the bathroom with a hot shower steam and have your child sit in the bathroom for 10 minutes. You can cuddle your child and read a story to keep him calm.

Your child will usually sit in a position that makes breathing easy. Do not force your child to lie down if he wants to sit up.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol®), **NOT aspirin**, can be used for a temperature over 101°F (38.3° C).

Do not give your child aspirin. Studies have linked aspirin with brain, liver, and kidney damage and Reye's syndrome.

If the croup is very bad, your doctor may tell you to take your child to the hospital. In the emergency department (ED) your child will be given treatments to open up the airways. Oxygen or IV fluids (fluids given through a tiny tube into a vein) will be provided if needed. Then, the ED staff will see if your child needs to stay in the hospital. How long he stays will depend on how long oxygen, IV fluids, or other treatments are needed.

Are there complications?

The most common complications of croup are ear infections or pneumonia. The most serious complication is complete blockage of breathing. While rare, you need to be aware of these potentially life-threatening complications and get help if you are worried about your child's breathing.

Call your doctor if. . .

- Your child has a hard time swallowing or is drooling.
- Your child is having so much difficulty breathing that he is restless and can't sleep.

- Your child complains of an earache or, in an infant, pulls at the ears.
- Your child has a prolonged fever or his temperature goes above 104°F (40°C) or 102°F (38.5°C) in infants.

Go to the nearest hospital if. . .

- Your child lacks the energy to eat, talk, or do simple tasks.
- Your child refuses to swallow or lie down.
- Your child has a bluish color on his lips or face.
- Your child's chest severely sucks in with each breath.
- Your child has noisy breathing at rest.
- Your child can't breathe.



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