

Let's Talk About...

Epiglottitis

Epiglottitis [ep-i-glaw-TITE-iss] is the swelling of the epiglottis [ep-i-GLAW-tiss]. The epiglottis is a tongue-like flap of tissue that covers the opening to the trachea (windpipe). Epiglottitis is dangerous because the swelling can make it difficult or impossible to breathe (see picture 1).

Epiglottitis may occur any time of the year, but it often happens in winter and spring. Children of all ages and adults can be affected. A type of bacteria, called "Hib," often causes this infection. However, epiglottitis has become very uncommon thanks to the Hib vaccine. In rare cases, other infections can cause epiglottitis.

What are the signs of epiglottitis?

Your child may show one or more of these signs:

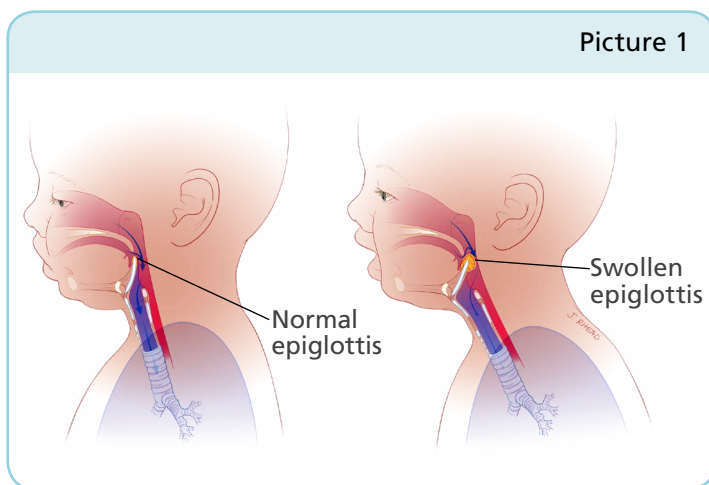
- A fever greater than 102°F (38.9°C)
- A very sore throat
- Trouble breathing
- Drooling
- Wanting to sit up rather than lie down
- A soft voice
- Refusing to eat
- Anxious or ill-appearing

How is epiglottitis treated?

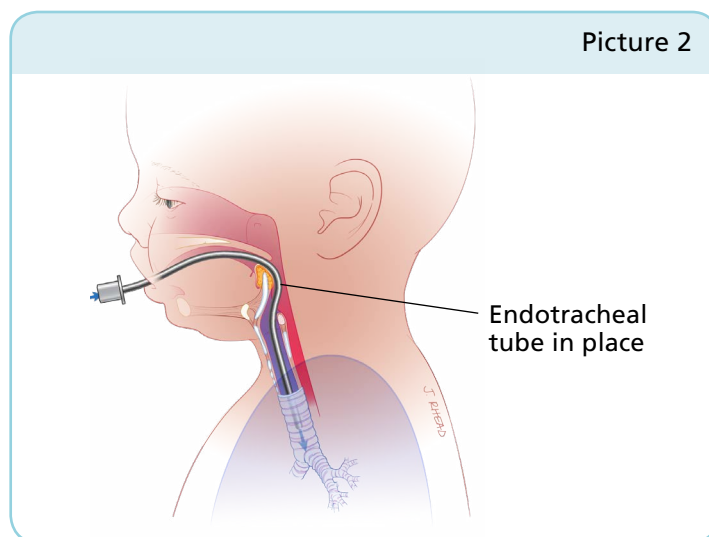
Epiglottitis is treated immediately by:

- **Keeping your child calm and opening their airway** from the mouth to the lungs. In most cases, a tube will be placed through your child's mouth into the windpipe. This procedure is called **intubation** (see picture 2).
- **Admitting your child to the pediatric intensive care unit (PICU).**
- **Giving your child antibiotics and other medicines** to reduce swelling and fight infection. The swelling is usually gone in 12 to 72 hours. Your child will take antibiotics for 10 days, first by IV (a tiny tube inserted into the vein). Once the swelling has gone down and the breathing tube is removed, your child can take antibiotics by mouth. Your child will be moved out of the PICU to a different unit or will go home. Make sure your child takes all of the antibiotics prescribed to them to prevent another infection.

Picture 1



Picture 2



How is epiglottitis prevented?

Children of certain ages should get the Hib vaccine to avoid getting epiglottitis. Ask your child's doctor whether your child needs this vaccine. Family members may need preventive treatment as well, so ask your family's doctor.

