

CROUP

Croup is swelling in the voice box and windpipe caused by common cold viruses. Croup can make it hard to breathe and cause a barking cough. In most children, croup goes away on its own but some children with croup need to be seen by a medical professional.

What are Symptoms of croup?

Croup usually begins like a regular cold. Children who get Croup start off by getting a runny or stuffy nose. A day or two later they usually:

- Get a cough that sounds like a seal barking
- Become hoarse (lose their voice or have a scratchy voice)
- Get a fever (temperature greater than 100.4°F or 38°C)
- Start having noisy, high-pitched breathing (called stridor), especially when they are active or upset

The symptoms are usually worse at night.

Croup can last two days to one week.

How is Croup treated?

Most children can be managed at home with mild symptoms. Children who are having trouble breathing should be seen by a doctor. The doctor might give:

- Medicines (via mask, by mouth or IV) to reduce swelling in the airways, making it easier to breathe
- Oxygen, if oxygen levels are lower than normal

The doctor will not offer antibiotics, because croup is caused by viruses, and antibiotics do not work on viruses.

Steps to Take - Care at Home

To ease your child's breathing:

- Sitting in a bathroom while the hot water is running in the shower, creating steam may help
- Have the child breathe outdoor air, if it is cold outside. Keep a window open for a few minutes. Wrap the child in a blanket to keep them warm
- You can use a cool mist humidifier in the room where the child sleeps
- Keep your child away from smoke and other things that may bother the lungs

What to Eat

To help your child get enough food and fluids:

- For breastfed infants, encourage frequent short breast feeds
- Encourage clear fluids during the day
- Offer smaller, more frequent meals and snacks instead of larger ones

Give your child plenty of fluids. Good choices are water or unsweetened juice with water added. Foods like soup, ice pops, or gelatin can also help. They may be easier for your child to swallow.

Activity

Have your child rest. Provide quiet, calm activities, such as coloring.

- Croup is often caused by a virus and can spread. Your child can return to school or day care when their fever has resolved, they are breathing normally and other symptoms have improved. If you are not sure, check with your doctor.

Medications

You can give your child medicine for pain or fever, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol, Tempra) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin). Be sure to read the instructions carefully.

DO NOT give your child medicines that quiet a cough. These usually do not work well and can have serious side effects in children. Cough and cold medicine are NOT recommended for children under 6.

If your child is having trouble breathing, your doctor may prescribe a dose of a steroid to ease swelling in the airways.

Note: Aspirin is **not** advised for children with a current or recent viral infection. Check with your doctor before giving your child aspirin.

When giving medicine:

- Give your child the medicine as advised. Do not change the amount or schedule.
- Use the measuring device that came with the medicine. If you need to use a spoon, cup, or syringe, make sure it has the units that match your child's prescription.
 - For example, if the medicine is given in milliliters (mL), the device should have mL on it.
- Be aware of the side effects of your child's medicine. Let the doctor know if any happen.
- Talk to your child's doctor before stopping any prescription medicine.
- Do not share your child's prescription medicine.
- Medicine can be harmful when mixed. Talk to your child's doctor or pharmacist if your child is taking more than one. This includes over the counter products and supplements.

Problems to Look Out For

Call or see your primary care provider or go to the ER if your child is not getting better or has:

- A cough that gets worse or symptoms of croup that last for more than 7 days
- Nausea and vomiting
- They start to drool
- They make a noisy, high-pitched sound when breathing, even just when sitting or resting
- The skin and muscles between their ribs or below their ribcage look like they are caving in
- Shows signs of dehydration such as:
 - Crying without tears
 - Decreased urination or fewer wet diapers
 - Dry mouth
- Your baby is younger than 3 months and has a fever
- Your baby is older than 3 months and has a fever for more than 3 days

Call for emergency medical help (911) or go to the emergency room right away if any of the following occur:

- Bluish color of the nails and lips, or around the mouth
- Low alertness, seems very sleepy or does not seem to respond to you
- Has a very hard time breathing, such as harsh, high-pitched breath sounds
- Unable to swallow
- Problems speaking or crying because they can't get enough air
- Is very upset

If you think your child has an emergency, call for medical help right away.

How did my child get croup?

Croup is caused by viruses that spread easily from person to person. The viruses live in the droplets that go into the air when a sick person coughs or sneezes. A person can spread these virus droplets before they are showing signs of infection.

Can croup be prevented?

There are ways to reduce your child's chances of getting sick with viruses that cause croup. You can help prevent infections from spreading if you:

- Wash your hands and your child's hands often with soap and water, or use an alcohol based hand sanitizer (do not use on infants who frequently place hands in mouth).
- Teach older children to cover their mouth when they cough.
- Do not share glasses, cups, utensils.
- Clean things that are touched a lot, such as counters, sinks, faucets, doorknobs, phones, remotes and light switches as well as infant toys and soothers.
- Stay away from people who are sick.
- If you cannot avoid people who are sick, wear a medical grade mask. When an adult or older child is sick, they should wear a mask if they are around infants and young children.
- Make sure that your child gets all of the recommended vaccines, including those for influenza and COVID-19.

*** This flyer contains general information which cannot be construed as specific advice to an individual patient. All statements in the flyer must be interpreted by your personal Physician or therapist who has the knowledge of the stage and the extent of your particular medical condition. Any reference throughout the document on specific pharmaceutical products does not imply endorsement of any of these products. Please visit our website at www.nbrhc.on.ca