

PATIENT INFORMATION

Croup

Information for parents / carers

What is croup?

- It is inflammation of the voice box (larynx) and the airways below it, which may make your child's breathing difficult.

What causes it and how to recognise it?

- Croup is usually caused by a viral infection. It spreads by respiratory secretions or droplets in the air from coughing, sneezing and breathing.
- The illness usually starts with the symptoms of a cold for a few days and then a loud barking cough with difficult breathing, which is especially noisy when breathing in. The noise is called stridor.
- The voice becomes hoarse.
- Croup mostly affects children under 6 years of age and the peak age is 1-2 years.

How long does it take to recover?

- It may last 5 – 7 days but expect 2 – 3 bad nights during the illness.
- Children often feel and sound better in the morning after a bad night, but the symptoms may return the next night.
- After 1 – 2 good nights, your child has probably made it through the croup.

What should I do if it happens?

- Most cases are mild and self-limited and can be safely managed at home.
- Occasionally croup can be more severe with about 1 in 10 children with croup requiring treatment in hospital.

The following can be done at home:

- Stay calm and try to calm your child, as it may be scary for them. If your child is agitated, their stridor will become worse.
- Offer drinks as good fluid intake helps to loosen the mucous secretions.
- Put the child in his / her preferred position.
- Cigarette smoke may aggravate the symptoms so keep the child in a smoke-free environment.
- Some people find that is helpful to have a stroll outdoors, carrying the child upright in the cool fresh air.
- Outdated information used to recommend steam treatment but there is little evidence that this is helpful. Some children have been scalded by hot water, so this is no longer advised.

When should I call a Doctor?

- If you are worried.
- If your child's breathing symptoms become worse. (Breathing is often noisy with mild croup, but it is difficulty in breathing that is worrying) Signs that breathing is getting worse include:
 - Rapid breathing.
 - Needing more effort to breathe.
 - You may see the chest or neck muscle being pulled in with each breath.
- If your child becomes restless or agitated.
- If your child looks unusually pale.
- If your child has a persistently high temperature despite being given Paracetamol or Ibuprofen.

What medical treatment is available?

A steroid medicine such as Dexamethasone may be prescribed to help to reduce the inflammation. A single dose often eases symptoms within a few hours. Steroid medicines do not shorten the length of the illness, but they are likely to reduce the severity of breathing symptoms

- DO NOT give cough medicines which contain ingredients that can make them drowsy. This will not help a child who may need extra effort to breathe.
- Antibiotics are not usually prescribed as croup is normally caused by a virus. Antibiotics do not kill virus.
- Very unwell children need nursing in hospital, sometimes in a High Dependency Unit.

Are there any other problems related to croup?

- Complications are rare but they can get ear infections or chest infections

Can they get it again?

- Yes, they can.

How do I prevent it?

- There is no vaccine available.
- Frequent hand washing and avoiding others with colds and chest infections may help.
- Pay immediate attention to noisy cough so that treatment can be give quickly.

Ring 999 for an ambulance if:

Your child is blue (cyanosed)

Unusually sleepy

Struggling to breathe

Drooling and unable to swallow

For more information contact:

Short Stay Paediatric Assessment Unit

**Telephone:
01803 655492**

8.30am to 9.00pm

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.