

Croup

Croup is a very common illness in young children. Several different viruses can cause croup, so a child may get croup more than once.

Symptoms

- Some children will have **fever**, but some may not.
- Most children will have some **congestion** and **sore throat**, much like a cold
- The voice often sounds hoarse, like **laryngitis**
- The **cough** from croup sounds different from a cold – it is barky and can sound like a seal
- The barky cough of croup is a result of swelling in the larynx (voice box) or trachea (windpipe). The swelling is usually mild and resolves in a few days. Occasionally, the swelling is enough to cause a high-pitched sound when the child breathes in; this is called “**stridor**.” If you think your child has stridor, call your doctor right away.

Course of the illness

The fever, if present, will last a few days and go away. Croup often gets worse at night, when the child is lying down. The barky cough from croup lasts a few days, then loosens up and sounds like the cough from a routine cold. The entire illness will last for one to two weeks.

Treatment

- Humidity helps the barky cough and hoarse voice of croup. Use a humidifier in the child’s room, or sit in a steamy bathroom for a while. This will soothe the irritated breathing passages.
- Cool air helps reduce swelling in the breathing passages.
- Most children feel more comfortable propped upright.
- Give plenty of fluids to keep the secretions thin.
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) can help fever or pain
- Cough medicines will not help much, are never given under age 24 months, and are avoided under six years of age.
- Antibiotics do not help croup
- Some children with more severe croup benefit from a short course of steroid medicine to help with the swelling in the breathing passages
- If a child gets an associated ear infection, antibiotics may be prescribed for the ear. They will not help the croup.
- Additional treatments are available for hospitalized patients.

. Signs of trouble- When to call the doctor:

- Stridor: a high pitched sound when breathing in, particularly if it occurs at rest
- Fever for more than 72 hours, or return of fever after it has been gone for more than a day (see fever handout)
- A restless child who seems “hungry” for air
- Excessive drooling

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