



Southeast Georgia PEDIATRICS

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Laryngotracheobronchitis

(Infectious Croup)



General Information

Croup is an illness of the respiratory system involving the larynx (voice box, vocal cords), trachea (windpipe) and the airways leading to the lungs (bronchial tubes). It can be caused by many different viruses, including those responsible for the common cold and influenza. Occasionally it is caused by a bacterial infection.

Croup is spread when infected mucus is sneezed or coughed into another child's face or onto tabletops where the germs are picked up on fingers (which then inoculate the eyes, or nose). Illness usually begins 2 to 3 days later.



The Illness

A hacking "croupy" cough which sounds like a barking seal and usually gets worse at night is the most typical feature. The cough is usually accompanied by a hoarse voice, sore throat and fever (100.4 to 104°F; 38 to 40°C). It is often severe enough to cause gagging and vomiting. There may be a harsh crowing sound ("stridor") with each inward breath. Some infants with croup are also quite grumpy and sleepy and have a poor appetite.

The worst of the illness lasts for 2 or 3 days; however, a wet mucousy cough may linger for another 1 or 2 weeks.



When To Call Your Doctor

You should call our office if you feel frightened or worried about your child's illness.

GO TO THE NEAREST HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM IF YOUR CHILD HAS: difficulty swallowing or continuous drooling; severe sucking in of the chest with each breath; or a bluish color to the lips.

We would like you to call our office immediately if your child has: increasing difficulty breathing; very fast breathing (over 80 per minute); or fever over 105°F (40.5°C).

Call us during regular office hours (and on weekends) if: your child complains of an earache or, in an infant, pulls at the ears; becomes increasingly cranky or keeps waking at night; fever lasts for more than 5 days; mucus in nose is persistently yellow or green.



Treatment

Croup can be very scary to children and parents. Often the most important treatment you can provide is to hold your child in your arms for comfort and reassurance.

Most children will benefit from inhaling mist, either cold or warm, from a vaporizer or humidifier. During sleep, the device should be close enough so that your child's hair is moist after a few minutes. To prevent burns, be particularly careful that hot water vaporizers are out of the reach of infants and toddlers.

If a vaporizer is ineffective or unavailable, sit with your child in a bathroom steamed up with hot water from the tub or shower. When cough or stridor get worse at night, 10 or 15 minutes sitting or driving in the cool night air can also be very helpful.

The use of salt water nose drops (¼ teaspoon of table salt in one cup of water) and gentle suction with an ear bulb syringe every few hours can be helpful if nasal passages are blocked. Your doctor may recommend a decongestant-cough medicine if s/he feels it is necessary and safe.

Acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®, Tempra®, Panadol®, Liquiprin®) can be used for temperature over 101°F (38.3°C). Aspirin given to children with influenza virus infection can lead to brain, liver and kidney damage, (Reye's syndrome) and should be avoided.

Because uncomplicated croup is almost always caused by a virus, antibiotics are of no help. If your doctor suspects an associated bacterial infection, however, s/he may prescribe an antibiotic.

Appetite is generally poor during the first days of illness, but it is helpful to encourage good fluid intake. Any juice or soft drink your child likes is acceptable. Forcing fluids is unnecessary.

Running about often makes the cough and stridor worse. Although children will restrict their own activity quite well, encourage quiet play during the early stages of the illness.



Contagion

Children with croup are most contagious during the first days of fever and illness. Little can be done to prevent spread of infection in a household; it is likely that other youngsters in the family will also develop a sore throat or a cough.



Return to Group Activities

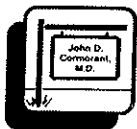
Infants and children may return to school or day care when their temperature is normal and they feel better. A lingering cough is no reason to keep them at home.



Common Concerns

Coughing is the way the body eliminates infected mucus from the airways. Overly vigorous use of decongestants or cough suppressants can interfere with this defense by making secretions thicker and more difficult to bring up.

Rarely, sudden onset of stridor or barking cough is due to a foreign body stuck in, or just below, the vocal cords. If you believe your child may have been playing with a small object (e.g. soda can tab, metal foil, safety pin) right before the illness began, let your doctor know.



Recheck Appointment

Make an appointment to be seen in _____ days.

Not necessary _____

Other _____



Further Advice from Your Doctor

Author, S. Michael Marcy, MD; Clinical Professor of Pediatrics, University of Southern California School of Medicine; Kaiser Foundation Hospital, Panorama City, CA

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