

CROUP and STRIDOR

Croup is a viral infection of the nose, vocal cords, larynx (voice box), and trachea (windpipe). During the winter months many children suffer from croup, with a distinctive cough that occurs with infections of the larynx (voice box). It usually starts as a cold with a low grade fever. It is characterized by a cough that is tight, low-pitched and sounds like a barking seal. The voice is usually hoarse due to swelling of the vocal cords. Some children younger than 6 years of age may wake up suddenly in the night and seem to have difficulty getting air into her lungs while inhaling. You may hear harsh and raspy sounds (stridor) when he/she breathes, which occurs only with severe croup and is usually only present with crying or coughing. This occurs as the opening between the cords becomes narrower.

Stridor occurs as the opening beneath the vocal cords becomes more narrow. A harsh, raspy, vibrating sound is heard when your child breathes in. Breathing in becomes very difficult. Stridor only occurs with severe croup and is usually only present with crying or coughing. As the disease becomes worse, stridor also occurs when a child is sleeping or relaxed.

Expected Course

Croup usually lasts for 5 or 6 days and generally gets worse at night. During this time it can change from mild to severe many times. The worst symptoms are seen in children under 3 years of age.

First Aid for Attacks of Stridor with Croup

If your child suddenly develops stridor or tight breathing, don't panic!!

Try one of the following:

- Calm the child. The difficulty breathing worsens with forced inhalations. Calm breathing will help.
- Warm, moist air seems to work best to relax the vocal cords and break the stridor. Have him breathe through a warm, wet washcloth placed loosely over his nose and mouth. In the meantime, run hot water in the shower with the bathroom door closed; when the room is all steamy, take him into the steamy bathroom for at least 10 minutes. Cuddle him to calm his fears.
- Take her outside in the cool night air
- Take a ride in the car with the window cracked.
- Put a vaporizer by her bed while she sleeps.

Most children settle down after the above treatments and then sleep peacefully through the night.

When to call us:

- If your child does not seem to be able to breathe easier after a half hour in steam.
- If your child has not been immunized with the HIB vaccine to prevent epiglottitis. Remind us that the child is not vaccinated. Epiglottitis can give similar symptoms and can be very dangerous.
- If breathing becomes difficult when your child is not coughing.
- If your child develops drooling, spitting, or great difficulty in swallowing.
- If your child develops retractions (tugging in) between the ribs.
- If your child starts acting very sick.

Call during regular office hours

- If there was difficulty breathing during the night
- If a fever lasts more than 3 days
- If croup lasts more than 10 days
- If you have other concerns or questions

Home Care for a Croupy Cough

- Humidifier. Dry air usually makes coughs worse. Keep your child's bedroom humidified. Use a cool mist humidifier if you have one. Run it 24 hours daily. If you don't have a humidifier, hang wet sheets or towels in your child's room.
- Warm, Clear Fluids for Coughing Spasms. Coughing spasms are often due to sticky mucus caught in the upper throat or on the vocal cords. Water, juice, lemonade or herbal tea may help loosen the sticky mucus and help your child to swallow.
- Cough Medicines. Medicines are less helpful than either mist or swallowing fluids. Older children (over age 4) can be given cough drops and sucking candies for the cough, and younger children can be given ½ to 1 teaspoon of corn syrup or honey. If your child has a fever (over 102°F or 38.9°C) you may give him acetaminophen or ibuprofen. (Dosage charts can be found under "Fever".)
- Avoid Smoke Exposure. Don't let anyone smoke around your child. Smoke can make croup worse. Avoid using a wood-burning stove, fireplace, incense or candles.
- Close Observation. While your child is croupy, sleep in the same room with her or use a monitor.
- Contagiousness. The viruses that cause croup are quite contagious until the fever is gone or at least until 3 days into the illness. Your child can return to school or child care once she feels better.