

# Croup

## Information for parents and/or caregivers

### What is Croup?

Croup is an acute respiratory illness caused by a virus, which produces swelling of your child's voice box (larynx) or windpipe (trachea). This swelling makes the airway narrower, so it is harder to breathe.

It usually affects children up to the age of five years old. Some children get croup several times.

### Signs and Symptoms

The first symptoms your child may have are the same as a common cold. They may then develop some of the following symptoms:

- Harsh barking "croupy" cough. This may be worse at night when the air is cooler
- Hoarse voice
- Noisy breathing (stridor)
- Respiratory distress
- Sore throat
- Fever

### How can it be treated?

If your child's croup attack is severe they may need to stay in hospital.

Severe croup is when your child:

- Has noisy breathing (stridor) when resting.
- Muscles around the ribs suck in when breathing
- Is very distressed.
- Antibiotics do not work on viruses and are not given to children with croup.
- Small single doses of steroid medication (dexamethasone or prednisolone) have been shown to be effective in the treatment of croup. This medication reduces the swelling in your child's airway helping them to breathe easier. Relief from symptoms can be seen within one hour of giving them this medicine

### How long does it last?

Croup is caused a virus that can be spread easily through coughing. Children with croup should be considered contagious for three days after the illness begins or until the fever is gone. Croup can last for three to four days, and is usually worse at night when the bodies cortisol levels are lowest. The cough may last longer as the throat is often irritated even after the infection is gone.

### Will it re-occur?

Croup may re-occur with subsequent colds. Each episode should be treated as carefully as the first. Your child's airway will become larger as he/she grows and as such, episodes of croup will usually become less frequent after they reach three to four years of age.

### At home Care

A mild attack of croup is when your child has the harsh, barking cough but does not have noisy breathing (stridor) at rest or is not struggling to breathe. Mild croup can usually be managed at home with the following treatment:

- Try to calm your child, as breathing is often more difficult when your child is upset.
- If your child has a fever and is irritable you may give Paracetamol
- Encourage your child to drink sufficient fluids.
- Humidification does not help.

If your child's croup does not settle and they become more distressed they should be seen by a doctor.

**Croup can progress quickly. If your child is having problems breathing they should be seen by a doctor as soon as possible.**

### When to seek help?

If, at any time, a child develops features of worsening or severe croup, seek immediate medical attention. This includes:

- Difficulty breathing
- Pale or blue-tinged skin
- Severe coughing spells
- Drooling or difficulty swallowing
- Inability to speak or cry due to difficulty taking a breath
- A whistling sound with breathing, or noisy-high pitched breathing while sitting or resting
- Sucking in of the skin around the ribs and top of the sternum with breathing

Parents should not attempt to drive their child to the hospital if the child is severely agitated, has blue-tinged skin, is struggling to breathe, or is excessively drowsy (lethargic).

### Call 000 for urgent ambulance assistance

A parent should call their child's healthcare provider if:

- A fever (temperature higher than 100.4°F or 38°C) lasts more than three days.
- Symptoms of mild croup last longer than seven days.
- There are questions or concerns about the child's condition.

## For more information

- See your family doctor
- For 24 hour health advice call:  
Healthdirect Australia 1800 022 222
- Parent Helpline 1300 364 100
- Local emergency department

Adapted from:

[www.uptodate.com/contents/croup-the-basics](http://www.uptodate.com/contents/croup-the-basics)

[www.uptodate.com/contents/cough-in-children-the-basics](http://www.uptodate.com/contents/cough-in-children-the-basics)

[www.uptodate.com/contents/croup-clinical-features-evaluation-and-diagnosis](http://www.uptodate.com/contents/croup-clinical-features-evaluation-and-diagnosis)

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## For more information

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