



# Croup

## Patient and Family Education

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**This teaching sheet contains general information only. Your child's doctor or a member of your child's health care team will talk with you about specific care for your child.**

### What is croup?

Croup is an illness caused by a virus. It causes part of the air passage to the lungs becomes swollen and narrow. Because of the swelling, when your child breathes in he makes a hoarse, raspy sound. Your child may also have a strange cough that sounds like a barking seal.

Croup may last many days, but the worst part is usually over in two to three days. It is usually worse at night. Many children will have a low fever (less than 100.3°F), but sometimes it will be higher. Because a virus causes croup, there is no special medicine to cure it.

### What is the treatment?

Your child's doctor will talk with you about specific care for your child. Some general guidelines to follow include:

- Keep your child calm. When he is excited or crying, it is harder for him to breathe.
- Place a cool mist humidifier by your child's room or play area.
  - Hot steam vaporizers are not safe. They may burn your child.
  - Change the water and clean the humidifier each day.
  - Follow the cleaning instructions that came with the machine, so it doesn't grow germs and mold.
- When your child's breathing is very noisy, run a hot shower to make the bathroom very steamy. Then, take your child into the bathroom for about 15 minutes. The steam will cool to room temperature, which your child will then breathe in as cool mist. **Always stay with your child in the bathroom. Be careful to keep him away from the hot water.**
- Only if your child does **NOT** have asthma: if your child's breathing is still noisy and it is cool outside, take him outside to breathe the cool air for about 15 minutes.
- Give your child extra clear liquids to drink such as Gatorade, flat, non-carbonated drinks and water. Do not force your child to eat solid foods.
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol or other less costly store brand) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil or other less costly store brand) may be given for fever, aches and pain. Follow the directions on the box carefully or ask your doctor how much medicine to give.
  - **DO NOT** give your child more than 5 doses of acetaminophen in a 24-hour period.
  - **DO NOT** give acetaminophen to babies younger than 3 months of age without a doctor's advice.
  - **DO NOT** give ibuprofen to babies younger than 6 months of age without a doctor's advice.
  - **DO NOT** use acetaminophen and ibuprofen together. **DO NOT** alternate.
- Your child's doctor may prescribe steroids for your child. Steroids are medicines that help reduce swelling in the airways. Steroids have no lasting effect on your child if given for a short period of time.
  - Tell your child's doctor if he was exposed to chickenpox in the last three weeks and has not had the chickenpox vaccine yet. He should not take steroids in this case.
- Avoid cigarette smoke and odor around your child.

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

# Croup, continued

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## When should I call the doctor?

Most children with croup can be cared for at home.

## Call 911 or your local ambulance service right away if your child:

- Is so tired and weak that he hardly responds to you
- Is working very hard to breathe or finds it hard to take a breath
- Has a blue or dark purple color to the nail beds, lips or gums
- Grunts when he breathes
- Chest retractions (skin pulling in around the ribs when breathing)
- Stops breathing for more than 10 seconds
- Cannot speak while trying to breathe
- Has any breathing problem that needs care **right away**

## Call your child's doctor if your child:

- Does not smile or show interest in play for at least a few minutes during any four-hour period
- Is working hard to breathe
- Has a cough that began after choking on an object in the past few days.
- Is choking when being fed clear liquids, drooling or having trouble swallowing

## Also call if your child has:

- A new fever since being seen by the doctor (temperature over 100.3°F)
- New symptoms such as chest pain, wheezing or stomach pain
- Problems taking the medicine ordered by his doctor
- A cough that often wakes him up at night
- A hoarse sound with every breath, even when he is resting quietly
- A high fever > 103° F since being seen by the doctor.

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**