



Croup

This leaflet explains how to care for your child at home if he/she has croup. It explains what the condition is, how the infection is treated and gives you some helpful suggestions to aid your child's recovery at home. If you have any questions or concerns that are not answered in the leaflet, please speak to one of the nursing staff.

What is croup?

Croup is a common childhood illness that can cause a distinctive, bark-like cough and in some cases can also cause difficulty in breathing. It occurs very commonly in autumn and winter. The symptoms of croup appear worse at night and most children get mild symptoms. Croup normally affects children aged between 6 months and 6 years. Croup (also known as laryngotracheobronchitis) can be caused by several viruses. In most cases, it is caused by the parainfluenza virus. It affects the airways including the voice box (larynx), windpipe (trachea) and lungs (the bronchi), causing them to become inflamed and to swell and become narrower. Some children may have two or more episodes of croup.

What are the symptoms of croup?

Your child may have:

- A harsh barking cough.
- A raspy high pitched sound (called a stridor) when breathing in.
- A runny nose, hoarseness and a sore throat. Croup may follow a cold but can also appear without any earlier illness.
- A high temperature (fever), general aches and pains and be off of their food.

How is croup treated?

Most children receive a steroid medicine to reduce the inflammation of the voice box and windpipe. A small number of children who still have breathing problems after taking the steroid medicine may need observation in hospital. A minority will need more treatment in the form of medicine that is breathed in through a mask (nebulised adrenaline) or, very rarely, support with a breathing machine.

It is very important to keep a child with croup calm. Becoming distressed and crying a lot can make the swelling around the windpipe worse and increase the breathing difficulty. You can help your child by sitting them upright on your lap to help comfort and reassure them. You should also ensure they are well hydrated by encouraging them to drink plenty of fluids. Regular paracetamol and/or ibuprofen (following the recommended dosage on the bottle / packet) will help to keep the temperature down.

In the past people used to treat croup by inhaling steam. There is no evidence that this helps

and it is currently not recommended, as having a small child leaning over hot water can lead to accidental burns.

How long is it likely to last?

The symptoms of croup usually last between 1-3 days. The cough may last a week or longer.

Is it infectious?

Yes, like other viral infections such as a common cold, croup can be picked up from people around you. Older people with the virus may only have symptoms of a cold.

When to seek help

Call NHS 111 or see a GP if:

- You are worried.
- Your child is making a raspy noise (known as 'stridor') every time they breathe in.
- They have a persistent temperature that is not resolved with paracetamol or ibuprofen.
- Your child is getting worse.

Go to A&E or call 999 if:

- Your child is struggling to breathe (you may see their tummy sucking inwards or their breathing sounds different).
- They are drooling or finding it difficult to swallow.
- Their skin or lips start to look blue or grey.
- They are unusually quiet and still.

Further information

www.NHS.co.uk/croup

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Paediatric Unit, February 2025

Next review due: February 2027