

Croup advice sheet

Information for parents and carers



What is croup?

Croup is an infection of the larynx (voice box) and the trachea (wind pipe). These are the upper and lower parts of the breathing tube, which connects the mouth to the top of the lungs.

Croup can cause the vocal chords to become inflamed (swollen and sore) and will make your child produce more mucus.

The usual cause of croup is a viral infection. Croup may follow a cold but can also appear without any other illness.

Croup is common in young children. It usually affects children aged 6 months to 3 years. After this age children are less likely to get croup.

What are the symptoms?

Cough:

A harsh barking cough, due to the inflammation of the vocal cords.

Breathing symptoms:

Breathing becomes noisy (usually sounding like a seal bark) due to the inflammation and mucus in the airway. As the airways become narrowed by the inflammation, your child may find it more difficult to breathe.

Other symptoms:

Runny nose, hoarseness and a sore throat. These are often worse at night.

What do I do if my child has croup?

- Remain calm and try to keep your child calm, as crying can make their cough and symptoms worse.
- Give your child paracetamol and/or ibuprofen to help with symptoms.
- Give your child regular cold drinks, which will be soothing for their throat.

Some people may advise the use of steam; however this is **not** something we recommended. There is no evidence that this is effective and there may be a risk of scalding your child.

Seek medical help from your GP, out of hour's service or the NHS 111 helpline if your child's condition gets worse, for example:

- they have rapid breathing
- the effort they are using to breathe increases
- their muscles in their chest and neck pull in when they breathe
- their nostrils flare when they breathe
- they are pale and lethargic (floppy or more tired than normal)
- they have a high temperature above 38.5°C.

If your child has any one of the symptoms below CALL 999

- **blue lips**
- **unresponsive**
- **struggling to breathe**
- **drooling or not able to swallow.**

How serious is croup?

Croup is often fairly mild, but can sometimes be severe. On average, 1 in 10 children are admitted to a hospital for further observations, but most are usually able to return home within 24 hours.

Treatments

Steroid medicine called dexamethasone or prednisolone is usually prescribed for more severe cases of croup. This helps to reduce the swelling of the airways and can make breathing easier. This is normally a one off dose but can be repeated after 12 hours if required.

Do not give your child medicines that contain ingredients that can make them sleepy or drowsy, such as cough mixture or antihistamines. This will not help them when they need to make extra effort to breathe and could be dangerous.

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALS@ouh.nhs.uk**

Author: Joanne Rogers, Junior Sister, Emergency Department
Simon Smith, Emergency Department Consultant
Sally Hitching, Senior Hospital Play Specialist

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Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Oxford OX3 9DU

www.ouh.nhs.uk/information

