

Facts about Croup

Croup is an infection of the throat and vocal cords and is caused by viruses.

When children under 5 years of age have the infection, it is called **croup**. In older children, it is called **laryngitis**.

At first a child with croup seems to have a cold, but then develops a fever and cough. The lining of the throat and vocal cords are red and swollen. The child develops a weak, hoarse voice and a cough that sounds like a bark.

Sometimes the air passage is also swollen and children find it hard to breathe. The child's breathing may then be quick and noisy.

In most cases, croup sounds worse than it is. Symptoms often get worse at night. The child may be very tired and not interested in regular activities because it is harder to breathe. In a very bad case of croup, the child can't breathe. Some children get so sick they need to be treated in a hospital.

How is Croup Spread?

The viruses that cause croup are spread in droplets coughed or sneezed or breathed into the air. The viruses can be in the mucus or saliva and kids can spread it by touching each other or by touching objects, such as toys or tables. **The viruses can live for hours on objects.**

Frequent hand washing is the best way to reduce the spread of respiratory viruses and are especially important during cold and influenza season.

Croup is caused by viruses. Antibiotics, that work against bacteria, will not help with croup.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol™, Tempra™) or ibuprofen (Advil™, Motrin™) may help reduce a fever and provide some comfort. Always follow the directions on the package about how much and how often to take acetaminophen or ibuprofen.

Never give products containing ASA (acetylsalicylic acid, such as Aspirin™) to anyone under the age of 20 years. Use of ASA products by children can lead to Reye's syndrome, a serious condition affecting the brain and liver.



What to Do at Home

- Wash your hands often when looking after a child with croup, to prevent the spread of infection.
- Give your child plenty of fluids to drink.
- You can help a child with croup breathe more easily:
 - Use a cool mist humidifier in your child's room **OR**
 - If it is cool outside, wrap your child in a warm blanket and take your child outside.
- **Do not give over-the-counter cough and cold medicines to a child under 6 years of age, unless your doctor tells you to.**
- Use saline nose drops (a weak salt water solution) to soften the mucus in the nose and help your child breathe better. Do not use nose drops that contain drugs. Use a bulb syringe to clear mucus from the nose.



When to Call Your Doctor

Call your doctor immediately if the child has croup and **any** of the following:

- has a fever for more than 72 hours or has a fever and is under 6 months of age
- has trouble breathing or is breathing very quickly
- is drooling saliva from the mouth and can't talk to you
- cannot swallow
- is uncomfortable lying down
- is unresponsive or listless
- If your doctor gives your child medicine, make sure you follow the directions carefully.



Children with mild croup can go to the child care centre or school, if they feel well enough to take part in activities