

# CROUP

## Information for parents and carers

### What is croup?

Croup is an infection of the voice box and windpipe. That is why a 'croupy cough' sounds like a harsh barking cough. The usual cause of croup is a viral infection, and several viruses can cause croup. Croup may follow a cold but can also appear without any earlier illness.

### Who gets croup?

Croup is common in young children and occurs most commonly between the ages of 1 and 3 years. As children become older, their breathing tubes develop, so croup becomes uncommon after the age of 6 years.

### Can croup be passed on?

As with coughs, colds, flu and other similar viral infections, there is a chance the infection can be passed on with close contact with others. Croup often occurs in outbreaks during the winter.

### What are the symptoms of croup?

**Cough:** which is usually harsh and barking. This is due to inflammation and swelling of the vocal cords in the voice box.

**Breathing symptoms:** a combination of inflammation of the lining of the breathing tubes and thick mucus can cause narrowing of the breathing tube. This narrowing can cause noisy breathing (called 'stridor') which can worsen in a distressed child.

**Other symptoms** may include a fever, runny nose, and sore throat. Children may also lose their appetite, and if unwell may not have as many wet/dirty nappies as usual.

### What to look out for?

The symptoms are often worse at night. Typically, during the day, a child may have a croupy cough with cold symptoms but might not appear to be too unwell. It can be that the cough and breathing worsens at night, causing distress for the child and parents.

The symptoms usually peak after 1-3 days and then start to improve. A slight cough may last a further week or so.

### What is the treatment for croup?

Your GP will have assessed your child today and may have recommended a steroid medication (prednisolone or dexamethasone). This works by reducing the inflammation in the breathing tubes to help your child breathe easier.

### What can I do to help a child with croup?

**Keep calming and reassuring:** a distressed, crying child may make their breathing worse. Sit the child upright on your lap if their breathing is noisy or difficult or simply let them find a comfortable position.

**Lower the fever:** a high temperature will increase the child's breathing and may cause them to be agitated. You can give liquid paracetamol or ibuprofen to help. Always stick with the recommended dosage for your child's age.

**Giving regular cool drinks:** but only if they are happy to take them, because if they become distressed it will affect their breathing further.

Steam used to be advised as a treatment. However, there is little evidence that this is any good. Some children have been scalded by steam whilst being treated for croup, so it is no longer recommended.

### When should I get advice?

#### Contact your GP if:

- You are worried about your child.
- Your child is having difficulty breathing.
- Your child is taking less than half his or her usual feeds over two to three feeds, or has no wet nappy for 12 hours.

**Contact NHS 111 if you need advice out of hours.**

#### Dial 999 for an ambulance if:

- Your child is having a lot of difficulty breathing and is pale or sweaty.
- Your child's tongue and lips are turning blue, or there are long pauses in your child's breathing.