

Paediatric Department

Croup in children

Croup is a common contagious childhood illness caused by a viral infection. Young children between 6 months and 5 years are most likely to be affected. The infection can cause swelling of the upper airways: voice box (larynx) and wind pipe (trachea) and can make breathing difficult. Croup is usually mild but it is important to contact your child's GP or NHS111 if you think that they have croup. This is because they may need treatment.

What are the symptoms of croup?

- Barking cough – sometimes described as a 'seal-like' cough
- Hoarse or 'raspy' voice
- A loud high-pitched noise ('stridor') when your child breathes in – this may be there all the time or just when they are upset
- Difficulty in breathing, such as breathing faster than normal, or sucking in their chest when they breathe
- A high temperature above 38°C (fever)
- Symptoms are usually worse at night and better during the day. It is common for symptoms to start in the middle of the night.

What shall I do if my child has signs of croup?

- ➔ Try to stay calm and keep your child calm, if possible
- ➔ Sit your child upright
- ➔ Treat a high temperature (if present) with paracetamol or ibuprofen. Remember to always follow instructions on the packet carefully, and do not exceed recommended doses
- ➔ You can allow your child to drink to soothe their throat, but do not force them to drink.
- ➔ Keep a close watch on them and seek medical attention if you are worried.

What is the treatment for croup?

The majority of children with croup will get better by themselves in three to seven days. Symptoms usually peak after one to three days and then improve. A mild but irritating cough may persist for a further week or so.

As croup is caused by a virus, antibiotics will not help. However, some bacterial infections, such as tonsillitis can cause similar symptoms, so do seek medical attention if your child continues to be unwell, or is not improving.

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In a few cases, children can become very unwell with croup.

- Do follow the advice below
- Seek medical help promptly if you are worried.

Medicines

In some cases, children need a medicine (steroids) to help reduce the swelling and inflammation in their throats. Steroids help to calm the inflammation and open up the airway and are usually given as a liquid, by mouth.

Steam treatment

In the past, it was thought that steam helped symptoms of croup. We **do not** recommend this anymore. There is no evidence that it helps and steam can cause burns.

Get an urgent GP appointment or go to your nearest hospital Emergency (A&E) Department if your child:

- has noisy breathing even when they are not upset
- is breathing fast or sucking in their tummy when they breathe
- is irritable, restless or very tired
- has a persistent high temperature of 38⁰C or above, despite using paracetamol or ibuprofen
- your baby is under 6 months of age and has breathing difficulties or a high temperature (above 38C if your baby is under 3 months of age; or above 39C if your baby is 3-6 months of age)
- Your child seems to be getting worse or you are worried.

Call 999 if your child

- is struggling to breathe
- has skin or lips that start to look blue , grey or very pale
- is very sleepy and difficult to rouse (wake up) or suddenly very quiet or still
- is drooling and finding it hard to swallow
- Suddenly starts having difficulty breathing and you think they are choking on something.

Trusted sources of further information

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/croup/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/first-aid-and-safety/first-aid/how-to-stop-a-child-from-choking/>

