

Croup

CAUSES

- Viruses (mostly). There are several "croup" viruses, so it's not like chickenpox where once you've had it, you don't get it again. Often sort of epidemic in nature, i.e., lots of kids are having it when it's around. This also means it is contagious. It is spread by coughs, snot, drool, and things that those things touch.
- Spasmodic (or familial): This is a condition where certain kids are "croupy" with a lot of different illnesses or situations. Usually a parent or sibling had the same thing when younger. Most kids grow out of this.
- The symptoms are caused by swelling of the larynx (voice box), trachea (windpipe), and large airways in the lungs (bronchi). Another name for croup is laryngotracheobronchitis. (See *why we call it croup?*)

ILLNESS DESCRIPTION

- Barky cough - sounds like a seal or dog.
- Stridor - a noisy breathing (in). Hoarse voice. Fever (optional). "Cold" symptoms. These are the typical symptoms of croup. They may vary from child to child.
- WORSE AT NIGHT. May even be normal during the day and then have another bad night. Usually lasts 3 nights (cough, not so barky, may last longer)

TREATMENT

Think of the cause - swelling. What do you do to your ankle when it swells? You put ice on it. You can't put ice directly on the vocal cords or windpipe without a lot of bleeding, so...

- COLD AIR (Outside, from the freezer, wherever you can get it, the colder the better). Hot, steamy showers - alternate with cold air. Take the child outside; get the barking under control, then go into a hot, steamy bathroom. Go back and forth as needed. (This won't give the child pneumonia, grandma).
- COOL MIST HUMIDIFIER (right on the child, get the air moist). Cough medicine will help in anticipation, but save it for after you've "broken" the attack



- CALM...CALM. ..CALM The things that make the swelling and symptoms worse are crying and coughing. Be calm and confident. If

two parents/adults are available, have the more calm of the two take the child from place to place and the less calm run the water, set up the humidifier, go get the cough medicine, whatever.

MEDICINES

- Cough medicine (Delsym®, Robitussin DM®, about anything with DM you can find).
- Steroid (prescription) - not mandatory, but has been shown to make the symptoms less severe, and may save a trip to the ER. Since you usually don't get a lot of warning with croup, you get to deal with the first night yourself, then call and often get the steroid going for the next night. It doesn't matter anyway, unless you're psychic, because steroids take several hours to begin to work so any dose given in the night wouldn't do anything for that night.
- Antibiotics - see above - this is a virus, not a bacteria, so antibiotics aren't helpful in the acute phase of croup. Some kids will get secondary infections of ears or lungs and need antibiotics later, but they are of no benefit in the first few days in anyone with croup.

IF YOUR CHILD CANNOT MAKE ANY NOISE AND CANNOT BREATHE, CALL 911. IF YOUR CHILD TURNS BLUE AND LIMP, CALL 911.

CROUP IS SCARY. BUT IS RARELY, RARELY, AN EMERGENCY. A trip to the ER will get you less calm, less cold and they don't have hot, steamy showers. You'll also make the child upset, cry, cough and get worse (and get a bunch of tests he doesn't need). Call us if you have questions. Croup is always a call at night since it doesn't come on during the day; so don't worry about waking someone.