

DEFINITION

There is a distinctive cough that occurs with infections of the voice box (larynx). The cough is tight, low-pitched, and barky (like a barking seal). The voice is usually hoarse during the day.

DESCRIPTION OF STRIDOR

A harsh, raspy, vibrating sound (stridor) is heard when your child inhales a breath. The breathing also becomes very difficult, and stridor is usually present with crying or coughing. As the disease becomes worse, stridor also occurs when a child is sleeping or relaxed.

CAUSE

Croup is a viral infection of the vocal cords, voice box (larynx), and windpipe (trachea). It is usually part of a cold. The hoarseness is due to swelling of the vocal cords.

Stridor occurs as the opening between the cords becomes narrowed.

EXPECTED COURSE

Croup usually lasts for 5 to 6 days and generally gets worse at night. During this time, it can change from mild to severe many times. The worst symptoms are seen in children under 3 years of age.

FIRST AID FOR ATTACKS OF STRIDOR WITH CROUP

If your child suddenly develops stridor or tight breathing, do the following.

- Inhalation of warm mist. Warm, moist air seems to work best to relax the vocal cords and break the stridor. If you have a cool mist humidifier, run it during the night.
- The Foggy Bathroom. In the meantime, have the warm shower running with the bathroom door closed. Once the room is all fogged up, take your child into the humidified bathroom for at least 10 minutes.

HOME CARE FOR A CROUPY COUGH

Warm, Clear Fluids for Coughing Spasms. Coughing spasms are often due to stick mucus caught on the vocal cords. Warm apple juice, lemonade, or herbal tea may help relax the vocal cords and loosen sticky mucus.

Cough Medicines. Medicines are less helpful than either mist or swallowing warm fluids. Older children (over age 4) can be given cough drops for the cough. If your child has a fever (over 102 F [38.9 C]), you may give her acetaminophen or ibuprofen.

Avoid Smoke Exposure. By all means, don't let anyone smoke around your child. Smoke can make croup worse.

Close Observation. When your child is croupy, sleep in the same room with her.

Contagiousness. The viruses that can cause croup are quite contagious until the fever is gone or at least until 3 days into the illness. Since spread of this infection can't be prevented, your child can return to school or child care once she feels better.

CALL 911 IMMEDIATELY

- If breathing becomes difficult (when your child is not coughing), and is distressed to catch a breath
- Your Child develops drooling, spitting, or great difficulty swallowing.

CALL OUR OFFICE

- Your Child develops retractions (tugging in) between the ribs.
- The warm mist fails to clear up the stridor in 20 minutes.
- Your child starts acting very sick.

CALL DURING REGULAR HOURS

- A fever lasts more than 3 days.
- Croup lasts more than 10 days.
- You have other concerns or questions.