

Coping with Croup

Croup is an infection of the vocal cords and upper windpipe caused by a virus. It usually affects children age 6 months to 5 years. Croup occurs most often in the late fall and winter. Unlike some illnesses, a child can get croup more than once.

If your child has croup, she or he may have cold symptoms during which a harsh, barking cough develops. This tight cough might resemble the bark of a seal and your child may be hoarse. A crowing sound, called stridor, may be heard when she/he inhales and the opening between the vocal cords becomes smaller.

These croup symptoms frequently occur in the middle of the night, which can intensify anxiety for everyone. A child with croup may be frightened by this difficult breathing. Try to be reassuring and distract your distressed child with a book, a cuddle or a game. Agitation and crying can make breathing difficulties worse and your child may be more comfortable sitting up than lying down, even though he or she is very sleepy.

A croupy cough or stridor may be relieved by having your child breathe moist air - using a humidifier or sitting with you in a steam-filled bathroom, with the window open and a hot shower running for at least 10 minutes. Encourage your child to drink cool, clear fluids such as water and juice. It may help to bundle both of you up and walk outside in the cool air for 15 minutes.

Secondary smoke can be harmful to your child's health at any time. This is especially true during times of respiratory illness or problems. Avoid taking your child into smoke-filled rooms or allowing anyone to smoke in your home, as this can worsen croup. If none of these measures help your child, or his or her condition worsens, call us immediately.