

What is croup?

Croup is an infection of the voice box (larynx) and windpipe (trachea). Croup causes the airway in the voice box to swell, making it hard to breathe. Because of that swelling, your child will have a bark-like cough. When your child breathes in, you may hear a squeaky sound.

Croup is caused by a virus. Your child's body will fight the infection on its own without extra medicine. You can use moist air to help with the cough or breathing problems (see below).

What are the symptoms?

Croup may start with a head cold or a runny nose. It often comes on suddenly during the night.

Other signs may include:

- Breathing faster than normal.
- Noisy breathing or a hoarse voice.
- Harsh, bark-like cough, especially at night or when upset.
- Vomiting.
- Poor appetite or poor fluid intake.
- Temperature above 100.4° F (38.0° C).

What can be done for breathing problems?

- Stay calm and try to comfort your child.
- Add moisture to your child's room by using a cool mist vaporizer or humidifier. Be sure to follow the directions for keeping it clean.
- Steam up the bathroom by turning on the hot water of the shower. Take your child into the room and close the door. After 20 minutes, your child's breathing should be easier and less noisy. **Note: Do not** leave your child alone in the bathroom.
- Bundle your child up and take your child outside if it is cool. Cool outdoor air can help your child breathe better.
- Give your child 1 to 2 ounces of clear fluids every half-hour.
 - **Over 1 year:** Use caffeine-free white soda, Gatorade®, apple juice, punch and Popsicles®.
 - **Under 1 year:** Use an oral electrolyte solution such as Pedialyte®, or Enfalyte®. Do not use plain water or boiled skim milk.
- Let your child get plenty of rest.

ALERT: Take your child to the emergency room if your child:

- Works hard to breathe. You may see your child's chest muscles pulling in under or between your child's ribs or at the neck.
- Has a blue or gray color to the lips or nail beds.
- Keeps breathing faster than normal.
- Cannot swallow spit or fluids.
- Drools more than normal.

Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child:

- Does not breathe better after 20 minutes of steam treatment or cool outside air treatment.
- Refuses to drink liquids for 24 hours.
- Shows signs of dehydration:
 - **If over 1 year** old, this includes no urine for 12 hours, sunken eyes or no tears when crying.
 - **If under 1 year** old, this includes no wet diaper for 8 hours, sunken eyes and no tears when crying.
- Has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This sheet was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.