

What is croup?

- **Croup** is swelling of the voice box (larynx) and windpipe (trachea). It can happen when your child has an infection with certain cold viruses.
- Croup usually lasts about 5 days.
- Croup is often treated at home but sometimes needs help from a doctor.

What are common signs and symptoms of croup?

- Cough that sounds like a seal bark.
- **Stridor**, which is a coarse, musical sound made when your child takes in a breath.

Why is croup dangerous?

- If croup becomes severe, your child may have difficulty breathing. This is rare but can be dangerous.
- In mild croup, you may only hear stridor when your child is active or crying. If the swelling worsens, you may hear stridor when your child is calm and resting.

How can I treat my child's croup at home?

- If your child has stridor or a barking cough, try to keep them calm. This makes breathing easier.
- Turn on a hot shower or bath faucet in your bathroom, and close the door to create a steam-filled room. Take your child in the bathroom and hold them or stand with them next to the shower or tub with the

bathroom door remaining closed. Stay in the room for about 15-20 minutes so that your child can breathe in the steamy air.

- If steam does not help, give your child a very cold liquid (such as ice cold water or a Popsicle) or open a window or the freezer door so that they breathe in the cool, moist air. You may also put a warm blanket on them and drive in the car with the window partially open.

What medicines treat croup?

- There is no medicine available over the counter to treat croup.
- Cough medications do **not** help. Do **not** give your child cough medications.
- Antibiotics do **not** help. Do **not** give your child antibiotics.
- If your child has stridor, your doctor or the emergency department may use steroids or a breathing treatment containing epinephrine to decrease the swelling in the windpipe and voice box.

When should I call my child's doctor?

Call your child's doctor, the local emergency department, or 911 at any time if your child

- Has stridor when **resting and calm**.
- Has stridor that is worsening.
- Has stridor that is not improving after trying steam and cool air or liquids.
- Is drooling or drooling more than usual.
- Cannot talk or is moaning instead of speaking.
- Cannot catch his or her breath.
- Has blue fingers, toes, or mouth.
- Is not breathing easier after trying steam or cool night air.
- Any time you are worried that your child is getting worse.

Additional Resources:

“Croup Treatment.” Health Issues section of HealthyChildren.org. Last revised 07/23/2014.

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by the University of Michigan Health System (UMHS) for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by UMHS and for which UMHS does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Author: Christina Krokosky Grech, MD (PGY-3, Pediatrics)

Reviewers: Alison Lea Dickson, MD (Clinical Instructor, Pediatrics). Ruti Volk, MSI, AHIP

Patient Education by [University of Michigan Health System](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](#). Last Revised 01/9/2015