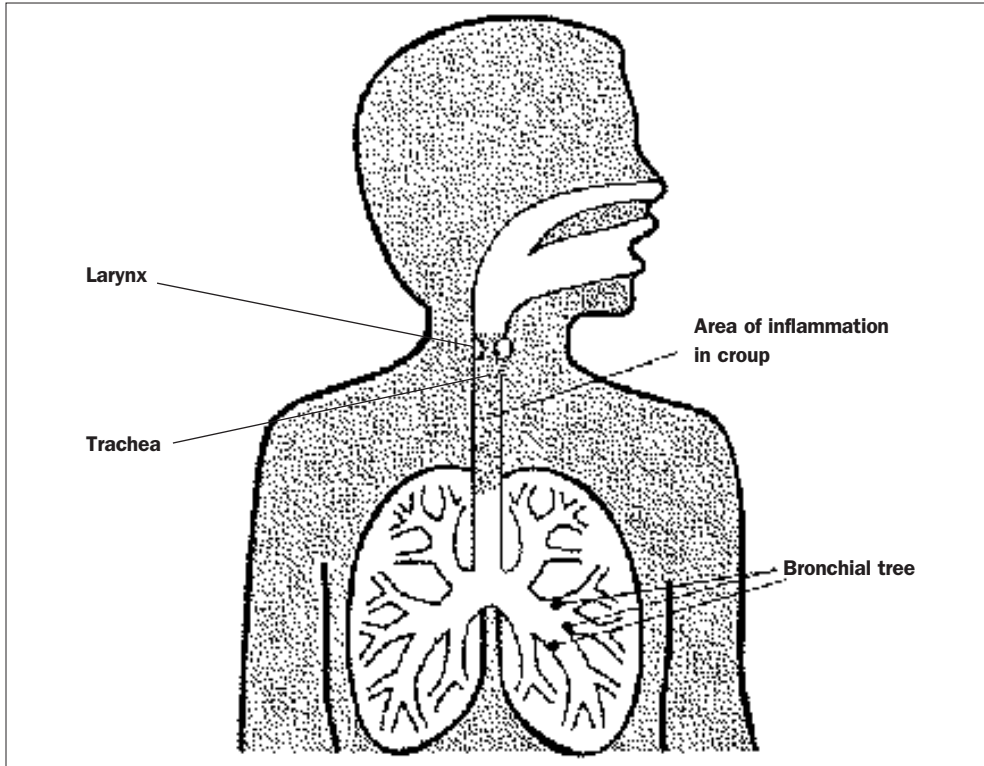


# Croup

## What is croup?



Croup is a common viral infection of the upper airway at the level of the throat that infects the voice box (larynx) and windpipe (trachea). The infection causes swelling of the lining of these airway passages thus resulting in less room for air to move in and out.

It is a special problem in children, who normally have narrow air passages, and usually occurs from six months to three years of age but can occur up to six years. The younger the child, the more susceptible they are to croup. As children grow older the size and strength of the air passages increase, making the problem of croup less likely. Croup tends to occur in the winter months.

### What are the symptoms?

A harsh, "barking" cough and noisy breathing are the main symptoms. Croup usually begins as a normal cold, then a sore throat, hoarse voice and fever follow. The cough, which is dry, hollow-sounding and "barking", is very characteristic. A stridor (a high-pitched wheezing or grunting noise with breathing) may develop, and this is a serious sign.

Attacks of croup usually occur at night, causing the child to wake up with a fright and with a harsh, brassy cough or stridor. The symptoms are worse if the child is upset.

### What usually happens?

The attack of croup may last for 3-4 days but the first 1-2 days are the worst. Sometimes the illness can last up to a week. The cough persists but usually becomes lighter

and looser with gradual improvement. There is no permanent danger to the throat after the attack. Some children can have further attacks.

### What is the danger?

Croup is usually a mild infection and settles nicely. However, in younger children it can sometimes cause complete airway obstruction, which is rapidly fatal. These children need to be in hospital to have specialised treatment and occasionally an airway tube inserted.

### What about other family members?

Older children in the family may be infected with the same virus but simply experience a cold without the characteristic croupy cough.

### What is the treatment?

It is important to keep calm and keep the child calm by comforting them on your lap or wrapping them in a blanket and carrying them outside, especially if the atmosphere is humid. The traditional method of using steam and vaporisers is no longer recommended. The evidence is that it is not very effective and children risk burns from the way that steam is generated, for example, by using boiling kettles.

### Treatment tips

- Give the child paracetamol for fever and general discomfort.
- Antibiotics will not help because croup is caused by a viral infection. However, they are used for any bacterial infection that

develops with the croup.

- Stay by the child's bedside until the child settles.
- Have the child propped up in bed or lying on a few pillows for support. Watching television can help the child relax.

### Medication

The modern method is to give the child steroids (cortisone) by mouth or by spray for the more troublesome attacks. Inhaled adrenaline may be used in hospital if necessary.

### When should you seek immediate medical help?

Call your doctor or take your child to the hospital urgently if:

- The stridor gets worse and is present when resting or sleeping.
- The breathing becomes very difficult.
- The breathing becomes noisier.
- The child becomes blue and pale.
- The breastbone of the chest sucks in on breathing.
- The child is floppy and dribbling.
- The child becomes restless or irrational.
- The child looks sick and you are concerned.

### Key points

- Croup is worse at night
- Keep the child calm
- Croup can be dangerous
- It can get worse quickly
- Get help if you are concerned

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