

Croup

Description

Croup is a barking cough from any kind of inflammation of the larynx (voice box) that occurs in children. It is common. Several viruses may cause croup. These include parainfluenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and various influenza viruses.

A young child (usually under 5 years of age) becomes mildly unwell with what seems to be a normal 'cold'. The virus infection causes the lining of the airway in the child's neck to swell, causing the airway to get narrower and making it harder to breathe.

The characteristic features of croup are a harsh, barking cough and a noisy, harsh sound when breathing in. This noise is caused by air vibrating as it passes through the narrowed, inflamed larynx. This will usually happen during the night. During the day the child is usually well apart from the cold. Seek medical advice if the child develops these symptoms.

How is it spread?

Viral infections are spread by airborne droplets. They can also be spread by contact with surfaces that have been contaminated by infectious airborne droplets (e.g. hands, toys, eating utensils).

Incubation period

Difficult to define, but about 2–4 days.

Infectious period

Shortly before the onset of symptoms and during the active stage of the disease.

Exclusion period

The child should stay at home until they are feeling well. Croup usually gets better in 3–4 days.³⁰ It is likely that a child with severe croup will need to stay in hospital for a short time to receive specialised medical treatment.

Responsibilities of educators and other staff

- Advise the parent to keep the child home until they are feeling well.
- Make sure staff and children practice cough and sneeze etiquette and effective hand hygiene.

Responsibilities of parents

- Keep the child at home until they are feeling well.
- Try and calm your child as breathing is often more difficult when your child is upset.³⁰
- Encourage cough and sneeze etiquette and effective hand hygiene at home.
- Avoid contact between your child and other children, or frail and elderly people, until they are feeling well.

Controlling the spread of infection

- Teach children about cough and sneeze etiquette
 - Cough or sneeze into your inner elbow rather than your hand
 - If you used a tissue to cover your nose or mouth when sneezing or coughing, put the tissue in the bin straight away
 - Clean your hands.
- Ensure staff practise cough and sneeze etiquette and hand hygiene, as above.
- Avoid contact between the person who is ill and children, or frail and elderly people, until the person is feeling better.

Treatment

Steroids either taken by mouth or sometimes inhaled through a nebuliser may be used, and these help to reduce the swelling in the airway which makes the breathing easier. Antibiotics do not work on viruses and are not given for croup.³⁰

30 The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne – Kids Health Info: Croup 2010, viewed 25 March 2013
http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Croup/