

Croup

Definition

- Croup is an infection of the voicebox (larynx) caused by a virus

Health Information

Symptoms

- The croupy cough is tight, low-pitched, and barky (like a barking seal)
- The voice or cry is hoarse (called laryngitis)
- Some children with severe croup get a harsh, tight sound while breathing in. This is called **stridor**.

Stridor: A Complication of Croup

- Stridor is a harsh, raspy tight sound best heard with breathing in
- Loud or constant stridor means severe croup
- All stridor needs to be treated with warm mist
- Most children with stridor need treatment with a steroid (such as Decadron)
- For any stridor, see First Aid for stridor (Treatment #2)

Cause

- Caused by a viral infection of the voicebox (larynx) and windpipe (trachea)
- Many different viruses can cause croup. Para-influenza is a common one.

Prevention

- Cover the nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash hands often. After coughing or sneezing are important times.

Care Advice

1. Overview:

- Most children with croup just have a barky cough.
- Some have tight breathing (called stridor).
- Coughing up mucus is very important. It helps protect the lungs from pneumonia.
- We want to help a productive cough, not turn it off.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

2. First Aid For Stridor (Harsh sound with breathing in):

- Breathe warm mist in a closed bathroom with the hot shower running. Do this for 20 minutes. You could also use a wet washcloth held near the face.
- Caution: Do not use very hot water or steam which could cause burns.
- If warm mist fails, breathe cool air by standing near an open refrigerator. You can also go outside with your child if the weather is cold. Do this for a few minutes.

3. Calm Your Child if He or She has Stridor:

- Crying or fear can make stridor worse.
- Try to keep your child calm and happy.
- Hold and comfort your child. Use a soothing, soft voice.

4. **Humidifier:**
 - If the air in your home is dry, use a humidifier. Reason: Dry air makes croup worse.
5. **Homemade Cough Medicines:**
 - Goal: Decrease the irritation or tickle in the throat that causes a dry cough.
 - AGE 6 MONTHS to 1 YEAR: Give warm clear fluids to treat the cough. Examples are apple juice or lemonade. Amount: 1- 2 teaspoons (5- 10 mL) four times per day. .
 - If nothing else helps: Give a small amount of corn syrup. Dosage: 1/4 teaspoon (1 mL). Can give up to 4 times a day when coughing. Caution: Avoid honey until 1 year old (Reason: risk for botulism).
 - AGE 1 YEAR and OLDER: Use HONEY ½ to 1 teaspoon (2 to 5 mL) as needed. It's the best homemade cough medicine. It can thin the secretions and loosen the cough. If you don't have any honey, you can use corn syrup.
 - AGE 6 YEARS and OLDER: Use COUGH DROPS or throat drops to decrease the tickle in the throat. If you don't have any, you can use hard candy.
6. **Over the Counter (OTC) Cough Medicine):**
 - OTC cough medicines are not advised. Reason: No proven benefit for children.
 - They are not approved by the FDA under 6 years. Reasons: not safe and can cause side effects. Also, they are not helpful.
 - Honey has been shown to work better for coughs. (Caution: Avoid honey until 1 year old.)
 - Age over 6 years: If you decide to buy a cough medicine, choose one with dextromethorphan (DM). It's present in most OTC cough syrups.
 - When to Use: Give only for severe coughs that interfere with sleep, school or work. See dosage on package label.
7. **Coughing Fits or Spells:**
 - Breathe warm mist (such as with shower running in a closed bathroom).
 - Give warm clear fluids to drink. Examples are apple juice and lemonade.
 - Age less than 6 months: Only give breastmilk or formula.
 - Age 6 - 12 months of age: Give 1-2 teaspoons (5-10 mL) each time. Limit to four times per day.
 - Age 1 year and older: Use 1 ounce (30 mL) or more at a time.
 - Reason: Both relax the airway and loosen up any phlegm.
8. **Fluids:**
 - Try to get your child to drink lots of fluids.
 - Goal: Keep your child well hydrated.
 - It also loosens up any phlegm in the lungs. Then it's easier to cough up.
9. **Fever:**
 - For fevers above 102° F (39° C), give acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen. See Dose Table. Note: Lower fevers are important for fighting infections.
 - For ALL fevers: Keep your child well hydrated. Give lots of cold fluids.
10. **Sleep Close By to Your Child:**
 - Sleep in the same room with your child for a few nights.
 - Reason: Stridor can start all of a sudden at night.
11. **Avoid Tobacco Smoke:**
 - Tobacco smoke makes croup much worse.
12. **What to Expect:**
 - Most often, croup lasts 5 to 6 days and becomes worse at night.
 - The croupy cough can last up to 2 weeks.

13. Return to School:

- Your child can go back to school after the fever is gone.
- Your child should also feel well enough to join in normal activities.

Call Your Doctor If

- Stridor (harsh raspy sound) occurs
- Croupy cough lasts more than 14 days
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

Pediatric Care Advice

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