

IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

CROUP

Croup is breathing difficulty accompanied by a "barking" cough. Croup, which is swelling around the vocal cords, is common in infants and children and can have a variety of causes, such as viruses (which are the most common), bacteria, allergies, acid reflux, and inhaled irritants.

Symptoms

- Croup features a cough that sounds like a seal barking. Most children have what appears to be a mild cold for several days before the barking cough becomes evident. As the cough gets more frequent, the child may have labored breathing or make a high pitch wheezing sound.
- Croup is typically much worse at night. It often lasts 5 or 6 nights, but the first night or two are usually the most severe. Rarely, croup can last for weeks. Croup that lasts longer than a week or recurs frequently should be discussed with your doctor to determine the cause.
- Complications of croup include bacterial infections, swelling of the windpipe, or dehydration.

Transmission

- Croup is usually (75% of the time) caused by parainfluenza viruses, but RSV, measles, adenovirus, and influenza can all cause croup.
- Before the era of immunizations and antibiotics, croup was a dreaded and deadly disease, usually caused by the diphtheria bacteria. Today, most cases of croup are mild.
- Croup is common in children 3 months to 5 years old, but it can happen at any age. Some children may get croup several times. It is most common in winter, but can occur any time.

Treatment

- Children with croup are usually diagnosed based on a physical exam. Occasionally other studies, such as x-rays, are needed.
- Most cases of croup can be safely managed at home, but call your health care provider for guidance **immediately** if the child has trouble breathing, bluish lips or skin color, unusual drooling, trouble swallowing, dehydration, or stridor (high pitched noise when breathing in).
- Cool or moist air might bring relief. You might first try bringing the child into a steamy bathroom or outside into the cool night air. If you have a cool air vaporizer, set it up in the child's bedroom and use it for the next few nights. Acetaminophen can make the child more comfortable and lower a fever. Avoid cough medicines unless you ask your doctor first.
- Viral croup usually goes away in 3 to 7 days. Bacterial croup can be treated with antibiotics.

Prevention

- Wash your hands frequently and avoid close contact with those who have a cold or cough.
- The diphtheria, Haemophilus influenzae (Hib), and measles vaccines protect children from some of the most dangerous forms of croup.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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