Croup

What is croup?

Croup is the narrowing of the air passage through the larynx (voice box) and the trachea (windpipe). It is caused by a virus that makes the area inflamed (swollen). This narrowing makes it hard for young children to breathe.

Croup can occur suddenly, often at night. It may come and go for 5 to 6 days, getting better during the day and worse at night. It most often occurs in children 3 months to 6 years of age. For older children and adults, the swelling can cause laryngitis. This is milder and does not cause a trouble with breathing since the airways are larger.

What are the signs of croup?

- harsh cough (sounds like a seal barking)
- high pitched, noisy breathing
- retractions (“pulling in” of the chest or hollow of the neck with breathing)
- hoarse voice or cry
- fever
- frightened look (caused by trouble breathing)
- pale or slightly gray color

What can I do for my child?

Stay calm and reassure your child. Anxiety can make it harder to breathe.

Have your child breathe in steam or cool mist. To make a steamy room, take your child into the bathroom and shut the door. Turn on the hot water in the shower or tub. Stay with your child in the room for about 20 minutes. (Keep your child from touching or leaning over the hot water or steam.)

In colder weather, take your child outside, dressed in warm clothes or wrapped in a warm blanket, for about 10 minutes. Keep talking calmly to reduce anxiety.

Encourage your child to drink plenty of clear fluids. You may need to try warm, cold, and room temperature fluids to find out what is most comfortable for your child’s throat.

Use a cool-mist humidifier or vaporizer in your child’s room. Your child may sleep better if you put books or blankets under the head of the mattress to raise it slightly.

Check on your child at least every 2 hours. You may want to sleep where you can hear your child’s breathing.

When should I call the clinic?

- breathing steam or cold air for 10 to 15 minutes does not help your child
- retractions (skin pulls in between the ribs)
- noisy or rapid breathing
- refuses to drink, trouble swallowing
- drooling
- refuses to talk or make any sound
- very restless
- fever that cannot be controlled with acetaminophen (Tylenol® or another brand) or ibuprofen (such as Motrin®)
- appears to be very sick

Questions?

This sheet is not specific to your child, but provides general information. If you have any questions please call the clinic.