



What is croup?

This is a term used to describe an inflammation of the mucous membranes in the region of the larynx and vocal cords, with partial blockage of the airways causing severe shortness of breath.

Croup usually comes on at night and is characterized by a barking cough. Every breath the child takes is accompanied by a whistling or hissing noise, particularly when breathing in. This noise is produced as the inspired air encounters the narrowed glottis when passing through the larynx on its way down to the lungs.

The inflammation, which is usually caused by virus, results in marked swelling of the mucous membrane of the larynx, particularly in the vicinity of the vocal cords. The inspired air travelling to the lungs has to pass between the vocal cords, and breathing (breathing in especially) requires great effort. Respiration may also be impeded by mucus which can no longer be coughed out through the narrowed airways. Croup predominantly occurs in young children, aged between 6 months and 3 years.

Because of their growth pattern, children in this age group still have a small larynx, which can easily become obstructed by

inflammation and swelling of the mucous membranes of the larynx and vocal cords. However, the condition can occur in older children up to the age of 10 years, too. In older children the larynx is large enough to allow sufficient air to pass through, even when the mucous membranes are swollen. At this age, inflammation of the mucous membranes simply causes varying degrees of hoarseness instead of croup.



Drug treatment

A variety of medicines can help to alleviate croup. Doctors sometimes prescribe a mild tranquiliser to calm a frightened child in this situation.

Cortisone suppositories have proved to be effective in reducing oedema of the mucous membranes. Some parents have concerns about using such preparations for fear of side effects. However, with croup in particular, bringing about a rapid reduction in mucosal oedema could be life-saving.





It has been found that cortisone suppositories only need to be given for a very short period (one or two days) in cases of croup, so there is no risk of side effects.

How to help your child and support your doctor's treatment

The most important thing is for you to stay calm and not let your child feel that you are unusually anxious. Anxiety is easily transmitted from a parent to a child. Soothe your child and stop it crying if you can. Take it in your arms as it will be much easier for the child to breathe in this position than when lying flat. Secondly, it is important that the child is able to breathe moist air. One way you can achieve this is by wrapping them up warmly and taking them out into the damp night air, on a balcony or terrace.

In addition, you can ensure the humidity level in your home is high by hanging damp cloths over the radiator. To reduce the mucosal swelling, you can lay a cloth that has been soaked in cold water or a flannel filled with ice-cubes on the front of the

child's neck. Also make sure the child gets enough to drink.

With these measures the child will often improve. However, you should always let your doctor know about the illness, so that he can decide how to continue treatment. In severe cases where there is a risk of acute suffocation, the doctor will have the child admitted to hospital.

You will find that even a very frightening attack of croup can be alleviated by calm, considered action.



Trust and co-operation with your doctor are important in every case.

We hope your child gets better quickly.

