

Croup

This leaflet provides information about croup. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your child's care.

What is croup and why has my child got it?

Croup is an infection of the upper airway, usually caused by a virus, often the parainfluenza virus. There have also been cases of croup in children with Covid-19 infection. It causes swelling of the larynx (voice box), trachea (windpipe) and bronchi (bronchial tubes).

Croup is common between the age of six months and six years. Many children will have two or more episodes of croup in their childhood. The same virus can affect children over six years old but it is unlikely to cause croup, as their windpipe is wider and stronger.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Usually begins with cold-like symptoms e.g., temperature, runny nose and a cough. Croup symptoms start after a few days and include:

- Barking cough that sounds like a seal
- Noisy breathing (stridor) – rasping sound especially when breathing in
- Hoarse voice
- Sore throat
- Symptoms which are often worse at night.

Do I need any tests to confirm the diagnosis?

No. Croup is diagnosed by the information you give to the doctors and the barking cough.

What treatments are available?

Some children with croup will need a dose of steroid medicine. This medicine helps reduce the swelling in the airway, which reduces difficulty in breathing. The steroid does not reduce the length of illness.

In more severe cases, children may also need a nebuliser of medicine (adrenaline), which quickly reduces swelling. Children who need this nebuliser must stay in hospital as the effects of this medicine only last a couple of hours.

What happens if my child does not get treatment?

Most children will get better without treatment in a few days. However, you should always see a doctor if your child:

- Has continuous noisy breathing when they are not upset

- Breathing symptoms worsen e.g., get faster, requiring more effort – chest or neck muscles may pull in with each breath
- Is restless or agitated
- Looks unusually pale
- Has a constant fever lasting longer than five days.

Call an ambulance if your child:

- **Is struggling to breathe**
- **Skin or lips look blue**
- **Is very sleepy, unusually quiet or still**
- **Is dribbling and unable to swallow.**

Is there anything I can do to help my child?

- Stay calm and reassure your child as they may become upset and scared with croup. Crying can make your child's symptoms worse. Sit your child upright on your lap if their breathing is noisy or difficult.
- Encourage your child to drink fluids regularly.
- Reduce fever only if your child is distressed by it, e.g., with paracetamol or ibuprofen. You must follow carefully the instructions that come with the medicine.

What doesn't help?

- Antibiotics are not usually prescribed as croup is a viral illness and antibiotics do not kill viruses.
- Do not use cough medicines, in particular those that have ingredients that cause drowsiness.
- Do not use steam inhalation as there is little evidence that it helps and it can cause scalds.

Useful sources of information

NHS conditions [Croup - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer). **Tel:** 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health. **Web:** www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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