

Information for patients

What is Croup?

Croup is an inflammation of the larynx (voice box) in the upper airway. It is common in young children during the autumn and winter months and is caused by a viral infection. Croup causes the area around the voice box to become swollen and narrower, making breathing more difficult.

The main symptom is a hoarse, barking cough which can follow the symptoms of a mild cold or may start very suddenly without warning.

This cough can be very noisy, even in mild cases and frightening for both child and parent. Other symptoms may include a hoarse voice or cry, breathing difficulty and stridor (a harsh noise heard when your child breathes in).

How is it diagnosed?

The Doctor will take a history of symptoms and will perform a physical examination of your child. There is no specific test to diagnose croup but the symptoms alone are usually enough. If it is your child's first episode of croup you should seek medical advice to confirm the diagnosis.

What treatments are available?

Antibiotics are not used to treat croup because they do not work on viral infections. As with the common cold, your child will make a full and complete recovery with rest and support.

However, if your child needs to be admitted to hospital, treatment may be given to help relieve the symptoms of croup. For mild or moderate symptoms a medicine called Dexamethasone may be given.

What are the benefits of these?

Dexamethasone is from the group of medicines known as steroids. These work to reduce the swelling around the larynx, making breathing easier. It does not cure the virus but helps with the symptoms until your child fights the virus off themselves.

What are the risks?

As this medicine is given as a high dose, for a short period only, usually as a single dose, it is known to be safe and effective in reducing the symptoms of croup.

What are the alternatives?

Other steroids such as Prednisolone are available to help reduce swelling around the larynx. Dexamethasone however is found to be effective and is available in dispersible tablets which once dissolved in a small amount of water are easy to give to young children.

What else can be done?

Whilst the symptoms of croup can be very distressing, helping your child stay calm can help a lot. Crying can make the symptoms of croup worse.

Information for patients

If Caring for Your Child at Home:

- Encourage your child to drink plenty of fluids and give them paracetamol to help relieve discomfort. Cough medicines are not thought to be helpful and some may cause drowsiness
- Elevating the head of your child's mattress may help ease breathing during the night when croup is likely to be worse
- Observe your child closely during episodes of croup. Symptoms such as drooling from the mouth, pale or blue tinge appearing around the mouth and severe 'pulling in' of muscles in the neck and chest when breathing may suggest their condition has worsened. If you suspect any of these you should seek medical help immediately

Will my child need to stay in hospital?

Symptoms of croup range from mild to severe and the Doctor may decide that your child needs to be observed on the ward. Most children only remain on the ward overnight but this depends on the severity of their condition and response to treatment. If your child needs further treatment this will be discussed with you.

What happens next?

Although your child may still have a barking cough and sound quite hoarse, providing they remain well in themselves, have no breathing difficulties and are drinking plenty of fluids, they will be discharged home.

Your child may continue to have a dry cough for 1-2 weeks which may get worse at night but generally they will make a complete recovery and no follow-up is required.

If needed the Doctor may arrange 24 hour 'open access' to the ward which will allow you to contact the ward directly (within the 24hr period following discharge) if you feel that your child's condition has worsened and needs to be re-assessed.

At **Grimsby** contact either, Paediatric Assessment and Observation Unit on 03033 304703 or Rainforest Ward on 03033 304477.

At **Scunthorpe** contact the Disney Ward on: 03033 302553.

What if I have any questions?

If you have any questions you can ask the Doctor or Nurses on the ward (or your own GP) who will discuss the information you need or contact NHS 111 (phone number = 111).

Information for patients

Any Comments, Compliments, Concerns or Complaints

If you have any other concerns please talk to your nurse, therapist or doctor. Our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) are available on 03033 306518 (Grimsby, Scunthorpe and Goole). You can also contact nlg-tr.PALS@nhs.net

As a Trust we value equality of access to our information and services, therefore alternative formats available on request at nlg-tr.interpreters@nhs.net

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