



MID-JERSEY PEDIATRICS

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CROUP

Croup is a viral infection of the vocal cords that causes a distinctive harsh cough that sounds like a barking seal. A child may have signs of a mild cold for one to two days before the hoarse voice and barking cough begins. Croup may also have a sudden onset, typically in the middle of the night. A high-pitched sound called stridor may be heard when your child breathes in, especially with crying or coughing. Fever may also occur. Spasmodic (non-infectious) croup can start suddenly during the night. The child with spasmodic croup is usually well the next morning.

Expected Course

Croup usually lasts for 5 to 6 days and usually gets worse at night. The stridor is variable in intensity. The second and third nights are often the worst for the stridor. As the illness progresses, cold symptoms and a loose cough develops and can last for many days.

Home Care

Fluids. Warm, clear fluids may help to relax the vocal cords and loosen mucus. You will need to pay close attention to fluid intake and urination to make sure your child does not get dehydrated.

Mist. Warm, moist air seems to work best to soothe the vocal cords. Steam up your bathroom with hot water from the shower and sit with your child for at least 10 minutes. Most children settle down after this treatment. You can also use a cool-mist humidifier in your child's bedroom while he or she is sleeping. If your child continues to have labored breathing, tugging at or below the ribs, or stridor, call our office immediately.

Medicines. Cough medicines are less helpful than either mist or swallowing clear fluids. If your child has fever, you may give acetaminophen. An expectorant like Robitussin is sometimes used.

Close Monitoring. While your child is croupy, closely monitor his sleep. Croup usually is mild, but it can also be a serious disease.

Contagion.

The viruses that cause croup are contagious until the fever is gone for one day, or at least until 3 days into the illness. Your child can return to school or daycare once he/she feels better and is without fever.