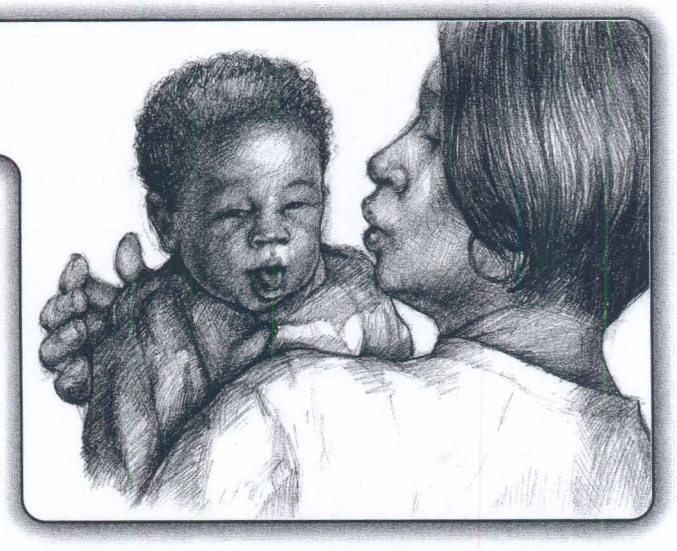
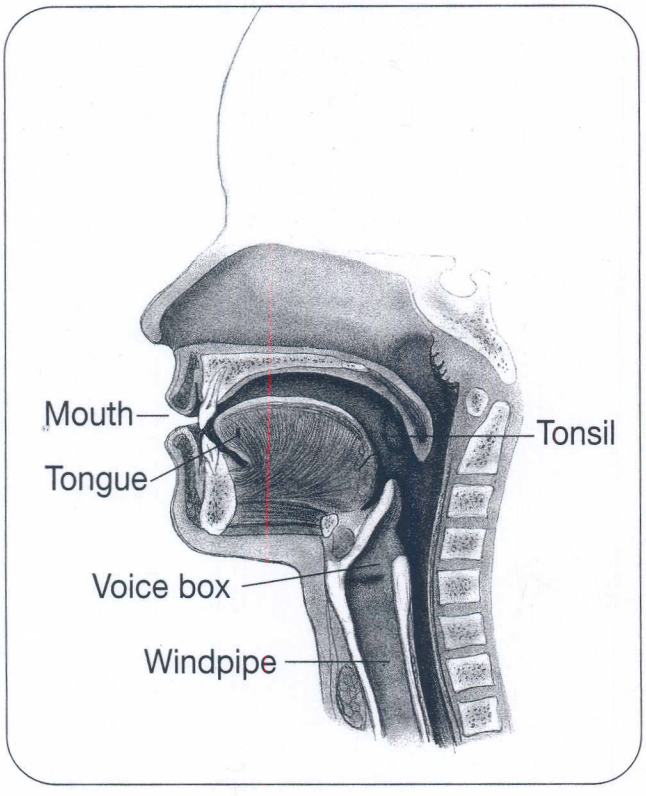
Croup



Croup is an infection that makes the inside of your child's throat swell up. This makes it hard for your child to breathe. It can be scary for both parents and children.

Croup is common in young children. Most cases of croup are mild. But croup can get worse and stop your child from breathing at all. Call the doctor if you think your child has croup and he or she is having a hard time breathing.

Croup is usually caused by a virus that infects the voice box and windpipe. The main sign of croup is a barking cough. It may start with a cold. Most children with viral croup have a low fever. But some have temperatures up to 104°F or 40°C.



Signs of Croup

Here are some signs your child may have croup:

- Barking cough
- Noisy or troubled breathing
- Hoarse voice
- Gasping for breath

What to Do for Croup

Call 911 or an Ambulance Right Away If…

…your child:

- Can't speak for lack of breath.
- Seems to be struggling to get a breath.
- Makes a whistling sound when breathing in. (This is called **stridor***.)
- Drools much more than usual or has a very hard time swallowing **saliva***.
- Has a bluish mouth or fingernails.

The above are all signs of severe croup. They may also be signs of other serious problems. Either way, if your child is having trouble breathing, you need to get him or her to the hospital.

* *Words to Know*

saliva (suh-LYE-vuh)—the watery liquid in your mouth.

steroids (STAIR-oydz)—a medicine that is a pill, liquid, spray you breathe in, or shot to help stop croup. It cuts down inflammation.

stridor (STRYE-dur)—a high whistling sound when your child breathes in. It is caused by something blocking the throat or voice box.

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Call the Doctor If…

…either of these is true:

- Your child is a baby 1 year or younger.
- The cough keeps getting worse.

Try Home Treatment

Croup may wake your child up in the middle of the night. If your child is not having trouble breathing, try these home treatments.

- Steam up the bathroom by running hot water in the shower. Take your child in the bathroom to breathe the moist air for 15 or 20 minutes. Steam works for many children.
- If steam does not work, bundle your child up and go outdoors for a few minutes. The cool night air may help your child breathe more freely.
- Use a cool-mist humidifier (hyoo-MID-uh-fye-ur) in your child's room for the rest of the night. Turn it on for the next 2 to 3 nights too.

Medicines for Croup

The doctor may prescribe **steroids***. Steroids help bring down the swelling in the throat.

Antibiotics don't help because croup is almost always caused by a virus.

Cough syrups don't help either. They can even make things worse. They may keep your child from coughing up mucus (MYOO-kus) that needs to come out if there is infection.

Who Gets Croup?

Most children get croup once or twice. Some children get croup every time they get a cold or the flu. Croup can come at any time. It's most common in the winter months.

Children are most likely to get croup between 6 months and 3 years of age. After age 3, it is not as common. That's because the windpipe is larger. So swelling is less likely to get in the way of breathing.

If your child seems to get croup a lot, he or she may have another problem. Talk with your child's doctor.

Can You Prevent Croup?

You *can't* really prevent croup. But you *can* prevent a more serious illness called acute epiglottitis (uh-KYOOT epp-uh-glah-TYE-tis). Its symptoms are a lot like croup, but worse. This illness usually strikes children 1 to 5 years old.

The good news is that the Hib vaccine can protect against this illness. Your child should get the first dose of Hib at 2 months old.

To learn more, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Web site at www.aap.org.

Your child's doctor will tell you to do what's best for your child.
This information should not take the place of talking with your child's doctor.

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