



Croup

Croup refers to an upper airway infection caused by several fairly common respiratory illnesses that affect infants and young children, usually between the ages of 3 months and 3 years, with most illnesses occurring during the second year of life. Croup occurs year-round depending upon the virus causing the illness.

School health and childcare provider information

Cause

Many different viruses, most commonly parainfluenza virus type 1. Not all persons exposed to the same virus will develop croup. Since many different viruses can cause the illness, a child may develop croup more than once.

Symptoms

Runny nose, sore throat, mild cough, and fever often occur one to several days before the cough starts. Croup is characterized by hoarseness and a deepening, non-productive and barking (like a seal) cough. Rapid breathing, sitting forward in bed to cough, or making a noise when breathing in may also occur. The child may be better during the day but gets worse at night.

The illness lasts 3 to 4 days, but the cough may last longer. Hospitalization may be required if the illness is severe.

Spread

Viruses causing croup are spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes tiny droplets into the air, and another person breathes them in. It can also be spread by touching the secretions from the nose and mouth of an infected person or by touching hands, tissues, or other items soiled with these secretions and then touching one's eyes, nose, or mouth.

Incubation

It may take up to 10 days after exposure for early symptoms to develop and several days later for the cough to occur.

Contagious period

From shortly before symptoms begin and for as long as the acute symptoms last.

Croup

Exclusion

Childcare

Until fever is gone without the aid of fever reducing medication and the child is well enough to participate in routine activities.

Diagnosis

Recommend that parents/guardians call their health care provider if their child has high fever, difficulty swallowing or breathing, or persistent sore throat or cough.

Treatment

Croup is a viral illness; therefore, antibiotics will not be effective. **Do not give aspirin or salicylate-containing medications to any child or adolescent under 18 years of age.**

Prevention

- Cover nose and mouth with tissue when coughing and sneezing or cough/sneeze into your sleeve. Dispose of used tissues in the trash right away.
- Wash hands often and thoroughly with soap and warm running water especially after contact with secretions from the nose or mouth or handling used tissues. Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces (door knobs, refrigerator handles, crib rails, water faucets, cupboard handles) at least daily (see Section 2).
- Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects and surfaces at least daily and when soiled (see Section 2).
- Do not allow sharing of anything that goes into the mouth, such as drinking cups, straws, water bottles, and eating utensils.

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 542-5230 or call your local health department.

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