

Croup

Croup is swelling around the vocal cords and windpipe that causes difficulty breathing and is accompanied by a “barking” cough. One of the most common causes of croup is a virus called **parainfluenza**.

Parainfluenza is a different virus from influenza and is not prevented by influenza vaccination. Croup cough should not be confused with pertussis or “whooping cough.” Whooping cough is characterized by an inspiratory “whoop” or gasp for air, between coughs, while croup yields its characteristic barking cough as air is expelled. Croup is usually self-limited and clears up on its own within a week, while pertussis generally lasts for a longer period of time and may require antibiotics.

Transmission

Viruses that cause croup are spread **person to person** when an infected individual coughs or sneezes. These can also be spread through common vehicle items when touched, like toys or door handles.

Symptoms

Croup features a barking cough. Most children have what appears to be a mild cold for several days before the cough becomes evident. This condition is generally worse at night and often lasts five or six nights, but the first night or two are usually the most severe.

Diagnosis

A doctor may check for the symptoms of croup, such as wheezing and decreased breath sounds. Laboratory tests can also identify the parainfluenza virus.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for croup. Like many other viral respiratory illnesses, one should treat the symptoms of croup with rest and fluids. Children may be able to breath easier in a humid environment such as a shower, or by placing a humidifier at their bedside. A doctor may recommend the use of over-the-counter remedies, like pain relievers, and may prescribe treatments for those with asthma or difficulty breathing. People with compromised immune systems should contact their health care provider for possible supportive care. Because it is usually caused by a virus, antibiotics are not useful to treat croup.

Prevention

There are currently no vaccines that prevent parainfluenza/croup. Prevention includes common infection control guidelines, such as hand washing and regular sanitization of community spaces. People who are sick should stay home to prevent spread of illness and wear a mask if in public.

Exclusion Guidance

Children in school and child care do not need to be excluded unless the staff determines the child is unwilling or unable to participate in activities. They also should be excluded if the staff determines that they cannot care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the health and safety of the other children in the group.

All others can attend work and other functions if they are well enough to do so and are able to practice good hand washing and respiratory etiquette.

For additional information about croup, contact the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services' Public Health Division at 800.427.2180.

Resources:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, December 22). *CDC Human Parainfluenza Viruses (HPIVs)*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved June 28, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov/parainfluenza/symptoms.html>.
2. Kimberlin, D. W., Barnett, E. D., Lynfield, R., Sawyer, M. H. (2021) Red Book: 2021-2024 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases. 32nd ed. American Academy of Pediatrics. [Management and Prevention of Infectious Diseases; Parainfluenza] [pages 555-557].

Revised June 30, 2023

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