Understanding Croup

Croup is an illness that affects a child’s breathing. It is caused by many different viruses. It most often occurs in the fall and winter months.

Croup occurs most commonly in children between 6 months and 3 years of age, but can occur in children of all ages.

Croup is characterized by a barking cough that can start quite suddenly. Often the child will have a hoarse voice and difficulty breathing. You may hear a high pitched sound when your child breathes in — this is called stridor.

Croup is always worse at night or when your child is lying flat.

Croup usually gets worse on the second night of the illness, and lasts up to a week.

Antibiotics do not work on Croup because the infection is caused by a virus.

Your child may get croup by coming into contact with another person with the virus. It is spread through coughing, sneezing or contact with the mucous on tissues, toys or hands.

A doctor will assess how serious your child’s croup case is. A mild case of croup means that the child has an occasional barking cough but no stridor is heard. In a moderate case, the child will have a frequent barking cough and stridor is easily heard when the child is calm. The child may or may not be agitated. When the illness is severe, the child will have a frequent barking cough, stridor can be easily heard and the child will be very distressed and agitated.