

## A Resourceful Father and His Internet Connections



# > Managing Croup at Home <

## > A Message from Dr. William Craig <



Croup is an illness that affects young children. It can come on quite suddenly and can cause severe coughing. In some cases, the child may have difficulty breathing. It is a stressful time for the parents of a young child.

Our first goal as health care professionals is to take care of your child. Another goal is to make sure that you have the information you need to understand your child's illness. Understanding the illness and how it is treated will ease the stress that you may have when your child is sick.

This booklet includes the story of a parent like you who had a child

with croup. The story tells about one family's experience. The story also includes medical information on the illness and how it is treated.

A story told through the eyes of a parent is a novel approach to passing on information. Most of us, from the very young to the very old, enjoy a good story. Stories also help us remember details – more so than reading a textbook or a scientific report.

This booklet includes one family's story but not all cases of croup are the same. Some are very mild and can be treated at home. In other cases the child should be seen by a doctor or at the emergency department. We have included information at the end of the booklet to help you in making the decision as to when you should see a doctor or go to the hospital.

I hope that this story will help answer some of the questions you have about croup. I also hope that you will find interest in reading other parents' stories, and that you will find comfort in knowing that you are not alone in your experience with croup. ▲

### **Dr. William Craig, MD**

Director of Pediatric Emergency  
Stollery Children's Hospital  
Edmonton, AB

### **Need Information?**

**For more information on Croup and how it can be treated please visit [www.albertadoctors.org](http://www.albertadoctors.org)**

# > Managing Croup at Home <

>>> Diane settled down in front of the TV to watch the ten o'clock news. She cherished this quiet time in her day after her two kids were in bed. Her husband Rick was finishing some work on the computer and would soon join her.

All of a sudden she heard cries coming from her daughter's room upstairs. Every once in a while, four-year old Emily would awaken after a bad dream, but this time it seemed different. Diane could sense real fear in her daughter's voice.

Diane heard Emily call out as she rushed up the stairs,

**“Mommy, Mommy, I can't breathe!”**



EMILY



> **Emily began to cough as Diane opened the door. It was a rattling, bark-like cough that was incredibly loud.**

Diane ran to the bed and tried to calm Emily down. They were sitting on the bed together when Rick appeared at the door.

"What's going on?" Rick asked.

"I'm not sure," Diane said. She thought about the day, trying to pinpoint a cause for Emily's sudden coughing and distress. Their day had been like any other. Emily had gone to playschool like she did regularly three times a week. She had eaten a good dinner and had gone to bed at her usual eight o'clock bedtime without trouble. Then she remembered. "I heard two mothers talking at the playschool. They said one of the little boys was sick at home with croup. Maybe Emily has the same thing."

"Diane, you stay with Emily, I want to see if I can find anything about croup on the Internet."

Diane rubbed her daughter's back and sang some of her favourite songs to calm her. Already Emily's breathing eased and she only coughed every once in a while.

#### Need Information?

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 but can happen in any season.

**> Meanwhile Rick headed down the stairs and back to his computer. He opened up his favourite web browser and typed in “croup”...1,120,000 hits!**

### Need Information?

Croup occurs most commonly in children between 6 months and 3 years of age.

He spent twenty minutes looking at different websites, most of which gave him the same information. Then he headed back upstairs.

“Did you find anything?” Diane said as she settled Emily in bed.

“I expect you're right – Emily probably got croup from a little boy at playschool. One of the sites I read said that croup is spread through coughing and sneezing and germs can be picked up from tabletops, toys, or other shared objects.”

“How can we be sure that it's croup and not something else?” Diane asked.

“I'm not sure, but the first website I checked said that croup is an infection that causes the windpipe and voice box to swell. The classic sign of croup is a loud, barky cough like the sound a seal makes. The child can show fast or difficult breathing and sometimes they make a squeaking sound when they breathe in.”





> **Diane and Rick stood in the doorway of Emily's room, watching their daughter. Diane crossed her fingers; please let her coughing stop.**

Minutes later, Emily was coughing again and crying. Every once in a while, Rick and Diane heard a high-pitched noise when Emily breathed in. Rick thought back to his recent website investigations and realized that this must be the 'stridor' that the websites had referred to. He also realized that this was a sign that they might have to go to the hospital.



### Need Information?

Take your child into cold air outdoors or sit by an open window or an open freezer door.



> **It was already late and Rick dreaded a long wait at the hospital. He thought back to the websites he had read and recalled the advice on some of them to have the child breathe in cool air.**

"Let's try opening the window," Rick said. Diane was puzzled as to why they would open the window when their child was obviously sick. Rick told Diane about the information he had read on the Internet as he walked over and opened the window. They held a bedside vigil for another twenty minutes. Emily remained calm and the coughing became less frequent. They no longer heard the squeaking sound when she breathed in.

"Maybe that's done the trick," Rick said hopefully to Diane, "she already seems a lot better." They decided to close the window as they didn't want her to get chilled. "Why don't you head off to bed," Rick offered to Diane, "I'll stay with her while she falls asleep."



> **Not long after Diane left the room, Emily's coughing started getting worse again and her breathing became strained. Rick realized that they might have to take Emily to the emergency department if things didn't get better soon.**

He decided to try one more option that was suggested on several websites. He gathered up some pillows and a blanket and took Emily into the bathroom. He made a little nest for them on the floor with the pillows and blankets and began to run cool water from the shower. Over the next ten minutes, Emily's coughing eased. They sat for half an hour working through a pile of Emily's favourite bedtime storybooks. Somewhere between the fourth and fifth recounting of *Goodnight Moon*, Emily drifted off to sleep.

Rick bundled her up in the blanket and took her back to bed. He sat on the bed for some time to make sure that she was



settled. When he was sure that she was sleeping soundly, Rick kissed Emily softly on the forehead and quietly left the room.

> Though it was very late, Rick had a couple of last questions for the Internet. He quickly ran downstairs and picked up where he had left off. After a few minutes Diane walked in.

"Yeah. Apparently kids can get croup more than once because there are many viruses that can cause croup. Kids can get croup when they become infected with each of these viruses."

"Did you find anything about how long Emily will have to stay at home?" Diane said as she pulled a chair up beside her husband.

### Need Information?

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.



"This site says that kids can go back to daycare or school when they no longer have a fever and they feel well enough to go back to their regular activities. It's okay to go back to daycare if she still has a cough."

Diane leaned forward in her chair, so she could get a better look at the computer screen. "How can we prevent Emily from getting croup again?"

"There's no vaccine or medicine to prevent croup, but we can decrease her chances of getting it again by making sure she washes her hands regularly, keeping her away from other people who are sick, and keeping her from sharing foods and drinks."



**Need Information?**

Hand washing, when done correctly, is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases. Good hand washing technique is easy to learn and can significantly reduce the spread of infectious diseases among both children and adults.

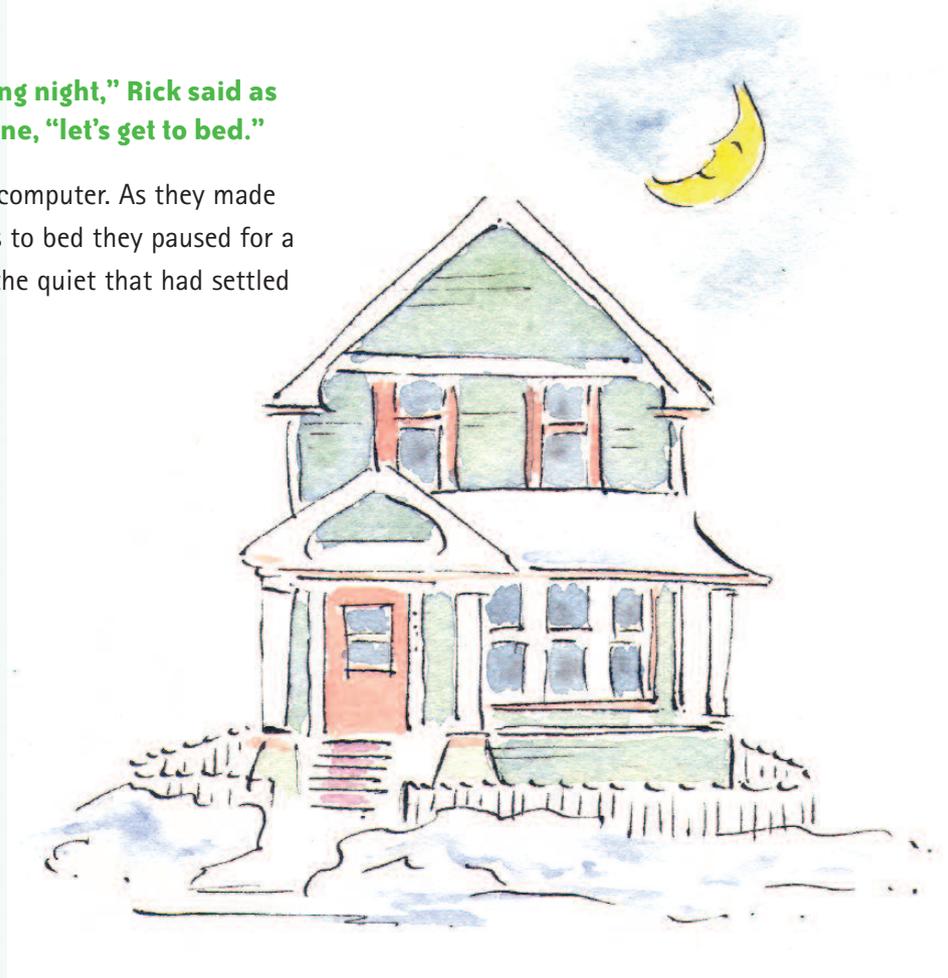


> “It’s been a long night,” Rick said as he turned to Diane, “let’s get to bed.”

Rick shut off the computer. As they made their way upstairs to bed they paused for a kiss and savored the quiet that had settled over the house. ■

### Need Information?

Patients who have had prolonged high-pitched, noisy breathing should follow up with a primary care provider or an ED physician.



## > Recommendations for Children with Croup <

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- Keep your child and yourself calm. The symptoms can get worse if your child is excited.
  - Take your child into cold air outdoors or sit by an open window or an open freezer door.
  - A cool-mist humidifier may help.
  - Sleep with window open.

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- Give your child plenty of clear fluids or popsicles when awake.
  - Encourage regular eating.
  - Give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol or Temptra) or Ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) for their fever or discomfort. Read the instructions on the bottle before you give your child any medication.

### VISIT THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT IF:

- Your child does not improve after 15 minutes of breathing cool air.
- Your child's breathing becomes difficult (when not coughing).
- Your child starts drooling or having a lot of trouble swallowing.
- Your child makes a high pitched noise when breathing in, even when they are calm, and the noise does not improve with cool air.
- Your child begins acting very sick.

### CALL YOUR DOCTOR IF:

- Croup lasts more than 10 days
- Fever lasts more than 2 to 3 days
- You have other questions or concerns.

### CALL 911 IMMEDIATELY IF YOU CHID:

- Has a bluish lip or fingernails.
- Appears very tired.
- Faints or passes out (unconscious).
- Stops breathing.



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*Booklet sponsored by CIHR Team in Pediatric Emergency Medicine.*