Croup

WHAT IS IT?
- Croup is the common name for laryngotracheitis (inflammation and narrowing of the larynx, trachea and bronchi caused by viral infection).
- It reduces airflow, causing breathing difficulty.
- It affects children aged six months to six years and boys are more commonly affected than girls.
- It occurs mainly in winter or early spring, usually in epidemics.

CAUSES
- Croup is commonly caused by the parainfluenza virus; other viruses such as measles or the influenza virus may also cause it, but do not always lead to breathing difficulties.
- It is spread through airborne droplets or by touch.
- Children born prematurely or with narrow upper airways are more prone to croup.
- Rarely, it is caused by bacteria or an allergic reaction.

DIAGNOSIS
- Diagnosis is on the basis of symptoms, especially the characteristic cough and appearance of the throat.
- The child should also be checked for fever, cold symptoms or recent viral illness.
- If symptoms are severe and do not respond to treatment, a neck X-ray may be necessary to rule out other conditions such as epiglottitis or a foreign object stuck in the throat.

TREATMENT
- The condition can be distressing and parents should try to keep the child calm.
- Sitting upright or carrying the child in cool fresh air can aid breathing.
- Plenty of cool drinks will prevent dehydration.
- If the child has a fever, paracetamol liquid (Calpol or Disprol, for example) or ibuprofen should be given.
- The child's clothing can be removed if the room is warm.
- Cough medicines that cause drowsiness should be avoided.
- The child should avoid smoky environments.

RARE COMPLICATIONS
- Severe croup may lead to life-threatening airway obstruction, when admission to hospital for ventilation is required.
- Children born prematurely or those with a history of lung disease, such as asthma, may develop severe breathing difficulties requiring hospital treatment.

Prevention
- Regular handwashing can help prevent transmission by touch.
- Avoiding contact with people with respiratory infections can help prevent airborne transmission.

WEBSITES
- Kids Health: www.kidshealth.org/parent/infections/bacterial_viral/croup.html
- NHS Direct: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk
- Prodigy: www.prodigy.nhs.uk