

Parainfluenza

Information for parents and caregivers

Welcome to the Southern Adelaide Local Health Network. This information sheet aims to answer any questions you may have about your child's parainfluenza.

What is parainfluenza?

Parainfluenza refers to a group of viruses called human parainfluenza viruses (HPIVs). There are four viruses in this group, each one causing different symptoms and illnesses. All forms of HPIV cause an infection in either the upper or lower respiratory tract. The most common HPIVs that are seen in children are HPIV types 1-3.

What are the types of parainfluenza viruses?

There are four types of HPIVs. They all cause a respiratory infection, but the type of infection, symptoms and location of the infection depend on the type of virus that your child has. The four types of HPIV can infect anyone.

HPIV can cause two different types of infections:

Infections of the upper respiratory tract

- Common cold
- Ear infections
- Sore throat

Infections of the lower respiratory tract

- Croup
- Pneumonia
- Bronchiolitis

HPIV-1&2

HPIV-1 is the leading cause of croup in children. Please refer to the croup parent handout for further information.

HPIV-3&4

An HPIV-3 infection is mostly associated with pneumonia and bronchiolitis. Please refer to the pneumonia or bronchiolitis parent handout for further information.

What are the symptoms of parainfluenza?

Common symptoms of the different types of HPIV are very similar to those of the common cold. They include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Barky cough
- Redness or swelling of the eyes
- Hoarse voice
- Runny nose
- Nasal congestion
- Decreased appetite
- Ear pain
- Sore throat
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing
- Difficulty breathing
- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea

How is parainfluenza diagnosed?

A sample of mucus is needed to positively identify the type of virus your child may have. A throat or nasal swab is ordered by the doctor and performed by a nurse or technician.

This test is done by inserting a small sterile cotton swab at the back of your throat or nasal passage to collect mucus.

Throat swabs do not hurt at all, but it might make your child gag a little when your doctor or nurse puts the swab in the back of their throat. This only takes a few seconds.

The specimen is then sent to the laboratory for testing.

Treatment

Please refer to specific handouts i.e. croup, bronchiolitis, pneumonia or common cold.

How to stop the spread of infection?

As with the cold and flu, parainfluenza can be easily passed from person to person. The virus itself is quite robust and can live on surfaces for up to 10 hours. As a result, it can spread rapidly through places where people spend a lot of time in close quarters, such as day care centres and schools.

To prevent the spread of infection, the same rules for the cold or flu apply:

- Wash your hands after coming in contact with someone who has a cold or the flu.
- Sanitise any objects and surfaces the ill person may have touched.
- If you are sick, cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze.
- If someone is sick, they should stay home and not attend day care or school until they are better.

For further information

See your family doctor

For 24 hour health advice call - Health Direct Australia
1800 022 222

Local Emergency Department

Adapted from

Uptodate: parainfluenza Virus

Parainfluenza: types, symptoms, and diagnosis:
www.healthline.com

Human parainfluenza viruses (HPIV) symptoms & causes:
www.childrenshospital.org

Parainfluenza Viral infections: www.healthychildren.org

For more information

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This document has been reviewed
and endorsed by consumers.