Acute epiglottitis and supraglottitis

Definitions
Epiglottitis is an inflammation of the epiglottis, which is the flap of cartilage that closes off the entry to your windpipe and voice box (larynx) when you swallow. It stops food from going down the wrong way into your lungs. When the epiglottis becomes swollen, it can begin to block the airway and make breathing feel difficult.

Acute supraglottitis is an inflammation of the windpipe just above the voice box.

These conditions are usually caused by the bacterium Haemophilus influenzae B (Hib), and sometimes by other bacteria and viruses, such as the parainfluenza virus or a streptococcal infection.

Symptoms
The first symptoms are usually a high temperature and an extremely sore throat. This is followed by severe difficulty in swallowing with drooling, spitting and fast and noisy breathing. As the area swells more, breathing can become progressively difficult.

What happens if you need to be admitted to hospital?
Severe epiglottitis and supraglottitis can block off the airways, at which point emergency treatment is required.
To support your breathing, you will most likely need oxygen. This is given via a humidifier and mask in order to make it moist and more comfortable for your lungs.

You may also be given medications via a nebuliser. This is a machine that turns the liquid medication into a mist, which you breathe in through a mask. These nebulised medications help open up and moisten the airways, reduce swelling and ease any difficulty in breathing you may be experiencing.

You will be given antibiotics to fight any infection and steroids to help reduce the swelling. At first, these medications are given into the vein (intravenously) as this method is the most effective.

Until swallowing feels easier, you may have a drip (intravenous fluids) to hydrate you. When able to eat, a soft diet is advised.

Discharge advice
• Your doctor will advise you on a specific period of recovery. Generally, two weeks of rest at home is recommended. If a sick certificate is needed, please request one from the medical staff before leaving the ward.
• Other family members or close contacts should be screened by their GP as the bacterial infection that usually causes epiglottitis or supraglottitis is easily spread.
• Minimise contact with people, particularly children. Also, avoid those with coughs and colds until fully recovered.
• Take any medications you have been prescribed. The nurses will explain how and when these should be taken.
• Follow a healthy diet and avoid alcohol until fully recovered. A diet of softer, easy-to-eat foods may be more manageable until your throat feels more comfortable.
• Smoking interferes with the body’s ability to heal and will only irritate the already inflamed area, so avoid or reduce smoking. Staff can provide advice, aids (e.g., nicotine patches) and support group contacts to help you quit.

Contact information
Contact F5 if you have any concerns following discharge or if you experience a return of symptoms such as worsening throat pain or difficulty swallowing or breathing.

Contact information
F5 ward: 023 8120 6511
023 8120 4644

NHS 111 service: 111

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please telephone 023 8120 4688 for help.