

Children's Ear Nose & Throat Center

Sub-specialists of Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas

A member of the  Soton Healthcare Family

Phone (512) 324-2720 • Fax (512) 324-2724
After Hours (512) 458-1121

Recurrent Respiratory Papillomatosis (RRP)

Respiratory Papillomatosis is the most common non cancerous tumor of the upper airway in children. Papillomas are small "wart-like" growths, which can be found in the nose, pharynx (throat), larynx (voice box), trachea (windpipe), esophagus (swallowing tube), and occasionally the lungs.

Signs and Symptoms

The most common symptom noted with laryngeal papilloma is a change in voice quality such as hoarseness or loss of voice. The changes are usually gradual and do not get better except when papilloma are removed. Children may have recurrent croup symptoms such as a barking or "seal-like" cough or stridor (noisy breathing).

Diagnosis of RRP

While the child is awake, a small flexible telescope is passed through the nose and throat to look for papillomas in the upper airway, to the level of the vocal cords.

A Microscopic Laryngoscopy and Bronchoscopy (MLB) may need to be done to look at the airway below the level of the vocal cords in addition to the voice box. This is done in the operating room with the child under general anesthesia.

Treatment for RRP

The goal of treatment for recurrent respiratory papillomatosis is maintaining a safe airway. This is done by repeated removal of the papilloma. Surgical treatment will not cure a patient of laryngeal papilloma but it is the most common treatment for RRP until the child's immune system fights off the virus (HPV) and the papillomas go into remission or regression. Various surgical treatment methods exist for removing papillomas. Lasers are able to vaporize the papilloma tissue.

The natural history of recurrent respiratory papillomatosis is one of several spontaneous resolutions in most children. When this resolution will occur is unknown. Surgical intervention is necessary to maintain a safe airway until the papillomas regress. Though treatments utilized should not create damage to surrounding airway structures, any surgical procedure can have complications. Extension of papilloma into the trachea and lungs can occur. This makes treatment of the disease much more difficult and life-threatening problems may develop.