

Heart Murmur in the Newborn

An information guide



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Congratulations on the birth of your baby!!

As you know, the paediatrician has heard a murmur during your baby's routine newborn examination today.

We know that you may find this very worrying and upsetting, but we would like to reassure you that the vast majority of these murmurs we hear during the first few days of life, disappear after the first few months.

What is a heart murmur?

A murmur is the medical term used to describe extra sounds that blood makes as it passes through the valves and blood vessels of the heart. It can be heard through a stethoscope between normal heartbeats.

What causes the murmur?

It is common for newborn babies to have heart murmurs in the first days of life (one study noted murmurs in 60% of newborn babies). It can be caused by fast blood flow through the heart, which is normal for babies.

The blood circulation system in the baby, inside the womb, is different to the circulation system in the newborn baby, after delivery. After birth, changes take place in the circulation pathways, which can cause murmurs.

Other causes

Murmurs can also be made by blood crossing through a hole in the heart or a valve that is too narrow or a leak in a heart valve.

What will happen to the murmur?

Most murmurs tend to disappear within a few days as the baby grows. This is because the changes that were taking place in the blood circulation system are now complete.

In some babies the murmurs can persist into childhood without anything being wrong with the heart – these are called “innocent” or “functional” murmurs.

In some babies there can be problems with the heart (1 in 145 babies can have congenital heart disease). But this is usually associated with other problems, which may become apparent in the first few days of life, such as rapid breathing, feeding difficulties, blue lips and failure to gain weight. In some babies there can be no symptoms or signs, apart from a heart murmur.

What happens now?

The paediatrician will check the oxygen saturation - measuring the amount of oxygen in your baby's blood by using a clip on the finger, ear or toe. If this is satisfactory, your baby will be discharged home.

We will be informing your GP and community midwife about the heart murmur. Your baby will be seen in clinic by a senior paediatrician in around 2 weeks' time.

If your baby becomes unwell in any way, please contact your GP or attend A&E for further advice. In particular we would like you to be aware of the following situations.

- Is your baby too breathless to feed?
- Has there been any change in their colour?
- Is your baby excessively pale or blue?
- Is your baby very sweaty?
- Is your baby not gaining weight as expected or losing weight?

If you answer "yes" to any of the above we feel it would be wise for a doctor to check that your baby is well. None of these symptoms necessarily mean that your baby has a heart problem. We would like to add that these symptoms should prompt parents to seek medical advice, regardless of whether or not a heart murmur has been heard.

If the murmur is still present at the outpatient appointment with the paediatrician, they may refer your baby to the cardiologist (heart doctor). The cardiologist may arrange for some tests including a scan of the heart (echocardiogram), which should not cause your baby any discomfort. This will be explained in more detail in clinic.

If you have any questions please ask the paediatrician again before you go home.

Notes

Notes

If English is not your first language and you need help, please contact the Interpretation and Translation Service

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☎ : 0161 627 8770

@ : interpretation@pat.nhs.uk

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