

Heart murmurs are very common in babies and in the vast majority of cases the heart is working normally and there isn't anything to worry about. Many children have heart murmurs and neither they nor their parents will ever know anything about it as many murmurs are innocent murmurs.

### **What is a “murmur”?**

The word murmur describes a swishing sound made as the blood flows through any of the heart's chambers or valves. It makes a sound like water rushing through a pipe. The murmur is an extra sound that is heard in addition to the normal heart sounds which are heard when the doctor listens to the heart with a stethoscope.

### **What causes murmurs in newborn babies?**

It is common for newborn babies to have heart murmurs in the first few days of life. When babies are in the womb they get oxygen from the placenta (afterbirth). After they are born they start to breathe and get oxygen from their lungs. Two of these connections which were in use when baby was in the womb should start to close immediately after the birth. It may however take a few days to a few weeks for this to complete. Sometimes the murmur which can be heard is blood passing through these “old” connections.

Another type of murmur can sometimes be heard as blood passes through the blood vessels to the lung. These blood vessels can be narrow in newborn babies. As the baby grows, the blood vessels also grow and so the murmur often disappears.

Occasionally a heart murmur can be a sign of a problem within the heart. Some of the problems that can cause murmurs

include a narrowing in one of the valves in the heart, (or a narrow blood vessel), a leaky valve or a hole between the chambers of the heart.

### **Does having a heart murmur mean that my baby/child has a heart problem?**

About one out of 100 babies is born with a structural heart problem (also known as congenital heart defect), so most heart murmurs are not caused by heart problems. The most common types of heart murmur are called functional or innocent murmurs. This means the murmur is produced by a normal, healthy heart. These types of murmur can come and go throughout childhood. They usually go away on their own as the child gets older and don't pose any health threat.

### **How do you know whether the murmur is a sign of a heart problem?**

Your baby's doctor/Advanced Neonatal Nurse Practitioner will ask you questions about whether your baby is feeding well or whether s/he gets tired while feeding. They will also examine your baby carefully and listen to your baby's heart using a stethoscope. Following the examinations if your baby's doctor/Advanced Neonatal Nurse Practitioner thinks there may be a problem with your baby's heart they will arrange for your baby to have an echocardiogram (ultrasound scan of the heart). This takes a special moving image of the heart's chambers and the flow of the blood; records the size and shape of the heart's chambers, valves, and vessels; and shows the direction of the blood flow within the heart to help determine how efficiently the heart is pumping

### **Does my baby need to come back to hospital to have the murmur checked out?**

If your baby's doctor thinks that the murmur is "innocent", they will see him/her in clinic in 6-8 weeks to examine your baby again.

### **Will the murmur go away?**

Murmurs often disappear in a few days to weeks in most babies who do not have a heart problem. However, some "innocent" murmurs may continue for life. It is especially common to hear these in children when the heart is beating faster, for example during episodes of fever or after exercise.

### **Symptoms of heart problems may include your baby being:**

- Inactive and sleepy
- tired and disinterested in feeds
- feeding poorly, getting tired whilst feeding & vomiting
- sweating whilst feeding
- breathless, breathing fast, sucking in of the spaces between their ribs
- pale, grey or blue colour
- clammy and cold skin

**If you are at all concerned about your baby when you return home please contact your GP.**

Further information can be found at:

<http://www.babycentre.co.uk/baby/health/heartmurmurs>



## **The Jenny Lind Children's Hospital**

### **Heart Murmurs**

Information for parents / carers



