

# What should you know about congenital heart disease?

## What is congenital heart disease?

Congenital heart disease (CHD), often known as a congenital heart defect, is an abnormality in the heart that develops prior to birth. Sometimes, there can be multiple congenital heart defects. The most common birth defect in the U.S., CHD develops when the heart or blood vessels near the heart don't develop normally before birth. While some heart defects are detected via ultrasound during pregnancy, many heart defects may not be identified until the baby is born or later during childhood.

## What are the symptoms of congenital heart disease?

Depending on the heart defect, symptoms can vary. Congenital heart disease can affect oxygen levels, giving the child a "blue" appearance. Some babies with CHD have very low blood pressure after birth. Heart conditions can also impact the infant's breathing, feeding, and weight gain. Minor heart defects may not have symptoms at all.

## How do I know if my baby has a heart defect?

Thanks to advances in imaging technology, some heart defects can be detected during pregnancy with prenatal ultrasound. Some heart defects may be detected with routine newborn oxygen screening at the hospital. Low oxygen levels may indicate congenital heart disease



and would likely lead to further diagnostic tests. And sometimes, CHD can't be detected until a child's routine well check-up at the primary care provider's office.

## What if my baby is born with a heart defect?

If your child's primary care physician suspects your child might have a heart defect, your child will likely be referred to a pediatric cardiologist. Pediatric cardiologists are specially trained to diagnose and treat heart problems in infants, children and young adults.

## How is congenital heart disease treated?

Most serious heart defects will require interventional treatment, such as a cardiac catheterization procedure, or heart surgery at a children's hospital. The type of heart defect will determine when and if such treatments are needed.

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