

Innocent Murmurs

The heart is completely normal with an “innocent murmur”.

A murmur is a term used by doctors when the heart has an extra noise. Many parents are surprised and even anxious when they first learn that their child has a murmur. Murmurs may sometimes be due to genuine heart problems. However, innocent murmurs are far more common and occur in a normal heart.

If the heart is normal, what causes the noise?

The noise is caused by turbulence as blood flows through the heart. A good example of turbulence is the eddying and swirling seen in a fast flowing stream. The same sort of turbulence is present in everyone’s heart, young and old, throughout life. In children, the turbulence can often be heard when a doctor listens with a stethoscope. It is often louder and hence more easily detected during an illness associated with a raised temperature (fever). As the heart works harder when the body temperature is high, the turbulence in the blood flow increase and the murmur is louder. This is why it is often heard for the first time when a child is seen for a common childhood illness like tonsillitis or an ear infection.

How common is it?

Very! Most normal children will have a soft innocent murmur at some stage. If a doctor detects a heart murmur, during an illness, he will often ask to see the child when they have returned to normal. This makes it easier for him to decide whether the murmur is normal innocent. Very few of these children need to be seen by a specialist. However, if the doctor has any doubts, your child may be referred to a paediatrician or a paediatric cardiologist for a specialist opinion.

What tests will my child have when they visit a Paediatrician or Paediatric Cardiologist?

If the doctor is unsure as to whether the murmur is normal or whether it may be associated with a heart problem, he may arrange some simple and useful tests. These may include:

ECG (Electrocardiogram) – this measures the electrical activity of the heart, which often indicates whether the heart is under any stress or strain.

Echo (echocardiogram) – this is an ultrasound of the heart and allows your doctor to see some of the structures in the heart.



Does my child need antibiotics when having dental work or surgery?

No! The dentist or doctor may ask you this if they are aware of your child's murmur. Some children with genuine heart problems do need antibiotics at such times. However, because your child's heart is normal, there is no need for antibiotics.

Will it go away?

Eventually the murmur disappears in most children before they are fully-grown. Occasionally it can be heard throughout life. However, this does not mean there is a problem. A murmur is commonly heard during pregnancy.

Will it cause trouble in the future?

No! Because the heart is normal, the murmur is of no significance. Whether the murmur disappears or stays, it will not cause trouble with the heart.

Does it need to be checked again in the future?

No! Once diagnosed as innocent the murmur does not need to be checked again. Nevertheless, it is important for parents to remember that the murmur is present, so that if a new doctor hears it for the first time, there is no need for alarm or to send the child back to the specialist.

The important thing to remember is that your child's heart is completely normal.

For more information

Department of Cardiology
Women's and Children's Hospital
72 King William Rd, North Adelaide SA 5006
Telephone (08) 8161 7261

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Interpreter



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