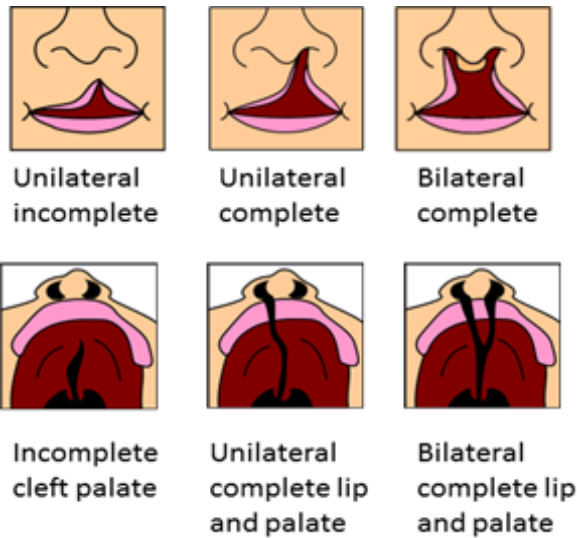




CLEFT LIP AND CLEFT PALATE

What are cleft lip and cleft palate?

A cleft lip is a separation of the upper lip. The cleft can occur on one or both sides of the lip. A cleft palate is a separation of the top of the mouth. Like cleft lip, cleft palate also can occur on one or both sides of the top of the mouth. Very often, someone who has a cleft lip also will have a cleft palate.¹



What causes cleft lip and cleft palate?

Cleft lip/palate is the fourth most common birth defect in the United States. One out of 700 babies is born with a cleft. The causes of orofacial clefts among most infants are unknown. Some children have a cleft lip or cleft palate because of changes in their genes. (See <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/birthdefects/cleftlip.html>.)

Cleft lip and cleft palate are thought to be caused by a combination of genes and other factors, such as what the mother eats or drinks, or certain medications she uses during pregnancy. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), these factors increase the chance of having a baby with an orofacial cleft:

Smoking – Women who smoke during pregnancy are more likely to have a baby with a cleft than women who do not smoke.²

Diabetes – Women with diabetes diagnosed before pregnancy have an increased risk of having a child with a cleft lip or palate, compared to women who do not have diabetes.²



Use of certain medicines – Women who used certain medicines to treat epilepsy, such as topiramate or valproic acid, during the first trimester of pregnancy have an increased risk of having a baby with cleft lip with or without cleft palate, compared to women who didn't take these medicines.²

How are cleft lip and cleft palate treated?

Surgery to repair a cleft lip is recommended within the first 12 months of life. Surgery to repair a cleft palate is recommended within the first 18 months of life or as early as possible. Many children will need additional surgical procedures as they get older.²

Because children with clefts often require a variety of services that need to be provided in a coordinated manner, the American Cleft Palate-Craniofacial Association recommends services and treatment by cleft and craniofacial teams. Cleft and craniofacial teams provide a team approach to care for children with clefts. These teams usually consist of experienced and qualified physicians and health care providers from different specialties.³

Are there special feeding issues for babies born with cleft lip or cleft palate?

A baby with only cleft lip usually does not experience feeding problems other than learning to attach to the nipple at the start of the feeding. Special nipples are currently available, if needed, to assist in feeding.

A baby with both a cleft lip and cleft palate, or with a cleft palate only, may need to be fed differently because there is an open area between the nose and mouth. It is best to hold the baby in an upright position to decrease the chance of milk leaking into the nose. Cleft palate babies also may swallow more air; frequent burping may be necessary. Watch for signs of discomfort. The baby will move the nipple in a comfortable position.⁴

The baby needs to receive proper nourishment through feeding. The baby's weight should be checked on a regular basis by a physician to ensure that he or she is gaining adequate weight.

Will a child with cleft lip or cleft palate have special dental needs?

All children require dental care; however, children with cleft lip or cleft palate require early evaluation by a dentist familiar with their special needs. These children may have problems with poorly positioned, malformed, or missing teeth. With early detection and intervention, children with cleft lips or cleft palates can lead normal, healthy lives.⁵



Where can a person learn more about cleft lip/cleft palate?

The Cleft Palate Foundation is a public service and education organization that provides services to patients and families. It also distributes informational brochures and fact sheets on clefts. The foundation's 24-hour toll-free hotline is 800-242-5338.

For a referral to a cleft palate/craniofacial team, contact:

Cleft Palate Foundation
1504 East Franklin Street, Suite 102
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
800-24C-LEFT
919-933-9044
Fax: 919-933-9604
info@cleftline.org
www.cleftline.org

For more information, contact the Division of Public Health, Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Services, at 302-744-4554 and www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsm/ohphome.html.

Resources

1. American Dental Association. 2014. *Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate*. In Mouth Healthy. Retrieved February 11, 2015 from: <http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/c/cleft-lip-palate>
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3. Cleft Palate Foundation. May 14 2008. *Choosing a Cleft Palate or Craniofacial Team*. In Cleft Palate Foundation. Retrieved February 11, 2015 from: <http://www.cleftline.org/parents-individuals/publications/choosing-a-cleft-palate-or-craniofacial-team/>
4. Cleft Palate Foundation. 2014. *Feeding FAQs*. In Cleft Palate Foundation. Retrieved February 11, 2015 from: <http://www.cleftline.org/who-we-are/what-we-do/feeding-your-baby/feeding-faqs/>
5. Cleft Palate Foundation. May 14 2008. *Dental Care for a Child with Cleft Lip and Palate*. In Cleft Palate Foundation. Retrieved February 11, 2015 from: <http://www.cleftline.org/parents-individuals/publications/dental-care-for-a-child-with-cleft-lip-and-palate/>
6. What is a Cleft Lip and Palate? [Illustration of Cleft Palate and Lip]. Retrieved February 16, 2015 from: <http://www.transformingfaces.org/programs/cleft-care/cleft-lip-palate/>

24/7 Emergency Contact Number: 1-888-295-5156

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Page 3 of 3