

Heart Murmurs (Innocent Murmurs)

Heart murmurs are an extra sound the heart makes when pumping blood. By far, most heart murmurs are innocent, meaning there is no heart disease present. However, some heart murmurs are pathological, meaning they are a sign of disease. If the doctor has any reason to suspect a pathological heart murmur, further testing will be done.

What are heart murmurs?

A heart murmur does not necessarily mean that your child has heart disease! It's the medical term for a type of extra sound made by the heart.

The heart has four chambers through which blood flows. The chambers are connected by valves. Heart sounds are caused by opening and closing of the valves and movement of blood through the heart chambers. Heart murmurs are the sound of blood flowing through the chambers or out from the heart. Most murmurs sound like a hum or like water rushing through a hose.

Heart murmurs are commonly found in children during regular checkups, most often between the ages of 3 and 7. By far, most heart murmurs are “innocent”—not a sign of heart disease. Temporary conditions affecting your child's heartbeat may increase the likelihood of an innocent murmur, for example, if your child is sick (such as with a fever) or anxious.

Other heart murmurs, known as “pathological” murmurs, are an important sign of heart disease. If the doctor has any reason to suspect a pathological heart murmur, your child will be sent for further tests.

How are heart murmurs diagnosed?

- In many cases, the doctor can be pretty sure a heart murmur is innocent just by listening to it with a stethoscope (an instrument that amplifies the heart sounds). If the

doctor diagnoses an innocent heart murmur, no testing is needed, and there is no increased risk of future heart problems.

- If there is any reason for concern, the doctor may arrange for further tests, such as an electrocardiogram (ECG), which measures the electrical activity during your child's heartbeat; an echocardiogram (“echo”), which uses sound waves to take pictures of your child's heart while it is beating; or chest x-rays. We may also recommend a visit to a heart specialist (a *cardiologist*).
- We are more likely to recommend further evaluation in infants, or if your child has any other symptoms of heart disease, for example, slow growth or blue color of the skin (cyanosis).

How are innocent heart murmurs managed?

- If your child has an innocent heart murmur, he or she needs no treatment! Innocent murmur means there's nothing wrong with the heart and no increased risk of future heart disease.
- There is no need to limit your child's activity because of an innocent heart murmur. He or she can run, play, go to gym class or camp, and do any other type of normal childhood activity.
- The heart murmur may or may not go away as your child grows. (It doesn't really matter, because it's a harmless condition.) The murmur may become more noticeable in some situations, such as when your child has a fever.

Remember to tell other doctors and health care providers about your child's heart murmur. This will help to avoid unnecessary concern and testing.

When should I call your office?

Call our office if you have any additional questions or concerns about your child's heart murmur. Remember, an innocent murmur indicates no heart disease!