

Heart Murmurs and Your Child

Many parents become alarmed when a heart murmur is heard in their child. Fortunately, in nearly all cases there is no need to worry—especially when your child has been healthy and growing well. Indeed, over half of all children have a heart murmur at some time while they are growing up, and the great majority of childhood murmurs are “innocent” (normal).

What is a Heart Murmur?

The word murmur describes a swishing sound made as the blood flows through any of the heart’s chambers or valves. These sounds are more easily heard in children, because children have a thinner chest wall and a more active circulation.

What is an Innocent Heart Murmur?

Innocent murmurs are sounds produced by a normal healthy heart. The sounds may be louder when your child is excited, scared, or sick. This does not mean the murmur is abnormal. Innocent murmurs are also called functional murmurs, vibratory murmurs, physiologic murmurs—or simply normal murmurs. Innocent murmurs often come and go throughout childhood, and usually go away on their own as the child gets older. They do not pose any threat to your child’s health.

If you’ve been told your child has an innocent murmur, do not worry. Your child does not have a heart problem, does not need any medications, and does not need to restrict physical activity. Children with this type of murmur are free to run, jump, play, participate in all sports.

Tests

In most cases, no tests are needed. The doctor will almost always know that the murmur is innocent simply because of how it sounds.

Occasionally, your doctor may suggest a referral to a pediatrician who will also listen to your child’s heart with a stethoscope or order an ultrasound of the heart called an echocardiogram. This test is safe and does not expose the child to any radiation.

For more information

If you want to learn more about heart murmurs, accurate information is available on the internet at the following websites. Most public libraries have connections to the internet if you do not have it at home.

- www.familydoctor.org> search “innocent heart murmur” > *Heart Murmurs in Children: What Parents Should Know*
- www.capitalhealth.ca> “Your Health” > “H” > “Heart Murmur” > *Innocent Heart Murmurs of Childhood*
- www.kidshealth.org> search “Heart murmur” > *AboutKidsHealth: Heart Conditions: Heart Murmurs*
- www.americanheart.org > “Children’s Health” > “Parents” > “Diseases, Conditions and Treatments” > *Innocent, Physiological & Functional Heart Murmurs*
- www.childrensheartclinic.org > Patient and Family Center > Patient Handouts > *Your Child Has an Innocent Heart Murmur*
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/health> > “Ask the doctor” > “H” > *Heart murmur in a three-year-old*

This handout has been adapted from the websites listed above.

