



# Developmental Differences of the Female Reproductive Organs

The uterus and part of the vagina are formed from two ridges of tissue while you are in your mother's womb. When the two ridges do not come together all of the way you may develop differences (also called congenital anomalies) in your reproductive organs.

## How do the female reproductive organs develop?

The uterus and part of the vagina are formed from two ridges of tissue on the left and right side of the body. This happens while you are still in your mother's womb (uterus). These two ridges must come together in the middle to form one structure. When the two parts do not come together all of the way you may develop differences (also called congenital anomalies) in your reproductive organs (this includes the uterus, cervix, vagina and hymen).

## What are the types of developmental differences?

Some teens have a type of developmental difference of the reproductive organs, including:

- No uterus and very little vagina – this is found during puberty, when a teen does not start her period.
- Extra tissue dividing the uterus or vagina (a septum) – this is usually found during an exam or an ultrasound.
- Extra tissue at the hymen, or entrance to the vagina – this is usually found when it is hard to place a tampon, have sex or during a routine pelvic exam
- Unicornuate – the uterus develops only on one side
- Didelphys – instead of one uterus, two uteri form
- Bicornuate or arcuate – the uterus has two sides

Some of these anomalies are also connected with differences in the formation of the kidneys.

## What are the symptoms of a developmental difference of the reproductive organs?

Most teens with developmental differences of their uterus do not have symptoms. You may only find out that you have a uterine or vaginal difference during a routine pelvic exam or with an ultrasound.

Some women will have signs or symptoms depending on the type of developmental difference. This includes:

- No menstrual (period) bleeding outside of the body. This may mean the vagina did not develop all of the way or a blockage is stopping menstrual blood from leaving the uterus. You will likely have pain if you have a blockage.

### To Learn More

- Adolescent Gynecology  
206-987-3005
- After hours on-call OB/GYN  
206-987-2000
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- [www.seattlechildrens.org](http://www.seattlechildrens.org)

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.
- For Deaf and hard of hearing callers  
206-987-2280 (TTY)

- Higher risk for miscarriage, infertility (unable to get pregnant), preterm (early) labor, or a breech baby (bottom first) during labor if you have a uterine septum, bicornuate uterus, didelphys uterus, or unicornuate uterus.

### How do you diagnose a developmental difference?

To find out if you have a developmental difference of the reproductive organs, your doctor will start with a physical exam. Your doctor may also:

- Schedule you for an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) or ultrasound so they can look at your reproductive organs. This allows your doctor to find out if you have a uterine septum, bicornuate uterus, unicornuate uterus or do not have a uterus. These tests may also be used to look at your kidneys to see if they have developed normally.
- Recommend a hysterosalpingogram to look at the cavity of the uterus, or a laparoscopy to look at the external surface of the uterus.

### What is the treatment for developmental differences?

Many teens with a developmental difference of the uterus will not need any treatment. If you are having severe pain with your periods or repeat miscarriages, your doctor might recommend surgery. If you have:

- A uterine or a vaginal septum, it can usually be removed by a surgery, in the clinic or in the operating room.
- A vagina that is not fully developed, it can usually be stretched to a normal length using vaginal dilators. Some teens want a vagina to be made. This is done by taking tissue from another part of your body and making it into the shape of a vagina.
- Extra tissue at the hymen or entrance to the vagina, it can be removed in clinic or in the operating room.
- A history of preterm (early) delivery, you may be able to have a cerclage (stitch to help keep the cervix closed) during pregnancy.

---

Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

© 2009 Seattle Children's, Seattle, Washington. All rights reserved.

10/09  
PE999