

Your Child's Small Ventricular Septal Defect

What is a ventricular septal defect (VSD)?

A normal heart has four chambers. The top chambers are called the atria and the bottom chambers are called the ventricles. The top and bottom chambers are separated by a wall called a septum. A ventricular septal defect (VSD) is a hole (defect) in the wall between the bottom chambers of the heart.

What should I know about a VSD?

- A VSD is a common heart defect.
- A person who has a VSD was born with it.
- During the first 8 weeks of fetal development, your baby's heart begins as a hollow tube. It then develops partitions that become the wall dividing the right side of the heart from the left. When the partitioning process does not occur completely, it leaves an opening in the wall between the bottom chambers of the heart, called a VSD.
- Normally, the left side of the heart only pumps blood to the body, and the right side of the heart only pumps blood to the lungs. In a child with a VSD, blood can travel across the hole from the left pumping chamber to the right pumping chamber and to the lungs. This causes extra blood to be pumped to the lungs.

What should I know about a small VSD?

It is usually the size of the VSD that determines whether your child will have any symptoms. The symptoms associated with a VSD are related to the amount of extra blood traveling through the VSD to the lungs. A small VSD will limit the amount of extra blood flow to the lungs and usually results in few, if any symptoms at all.

How is it diagnosed?

To diagnose this condition, your doctor will:

- Examine your child
- Check your child's heartbeat
- Use a stethoscope to listen for an unusual sound (murmur)
- Ask about your child's symptoms and health history
- Ask about your family's health history
- Order an echocardiogram (ultrasound)
- Order an electrocardiogram (to check heart rhythm)

To Learn More

- Heart Center
206-987-2015
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your 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.

Will my child need medicine or surgery?

A small VSD often closes on its own; it depends on the size and location. Very rarely, even a small VSD can cause other problems in the heart that your child's cardiologist will monitor. If these problems develop, surgery to close the VSD may be required.

There are not any medicines or other treatments that will make the VSD get smaller or close any faster than it might do naturally.

What does follow-up look like?

If the VSD is small, your child may need to follow up in the Heart Center for a few visits. In other cases, they might only need regular checkups at the pediatrician's office. Some people have a small VSD for life that does not cause symptoms. They need regular checkups to make sure their heart stays healthy.

Will my child have physical activity restrictions?

No, it is unlikely your child will need any physical activity restrictions.

Where can I learn more?

- Seattle Children's handout "Heart Diagram with Text Labels"
seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE734B.pdf
- American Heart Association "Ventricular Septal Defect (VSD)"
<https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/congenital-heart-defects/about-congenital-heart-defects/ventricular-septal-defect-vsd>
- Kid's Health "Ventricular Septal Defect"
kidshealth.org/parent/medical/heart/vsd.html