

**Office for Genetics
and
Children with Special Health Care Needs**

Cleft Palate Fact Sheet

What Is Cleft Palate?

- It is a birth defect that affects the roof of the mouth
- Cleft- is a split or separation
- Cleft Palate can be unilateral (a split on one side) or bilateral (a split on each side) or it can extend the full length of the palate into the nasal cavity

What is the cause?

- The exact cause of Cleft Palate remains unknown
- There are (3) main factors that may contribute to an infant being born with Cleft Palate
 1. Inherited Characteristic – a single characteristic inherited from one or both parents
 2. Environmental-exposure to toxins
 3. Genetic syndromes- on of a group of abnormalities inherited from one or both parents

Signs and Symptoms

- A visible opening (cleft) in the roof of the mouth that may extend into the nasal cavity
- Until treated it can cause problems with feeding, speech development and ear infections
- Possible dental problems

Is there any treatment?

- Cleft Palate is best treated by a team of professionals with experience in this area to address the repair and any speech, hearing or dental issues that are present
- Surgery for Cleft Palate is normally performed when the infant is between 9-18 months of age. Until surgery is performed, feeding may have to be adjusted such as using a special nipple for the baby's bottle
- Cleft Palate is repaired through a surgical procedure called "palatoplasty". Palatoplasty-surgical procedure in which the surgeon will use tissue on both sides of the opening and attach it together. This process closes the opening to the nose and includes the muscles that lift the palate
- Speech therapy is often needed even after surgery is done and hearing should be monitored

Support Groups/Resources

- Kennedy Krieger Institute
<http://www.kennedykrieger.org>
443-923-9200
- March of Dimes
<http://www.marchofdimes.com>
1-410-546-2241
- Office for Genetics and Children with Special Health Care Needs
<http://fha.maryland.gov/genetics/bdris.cfm>
1-800-638-8864
- The Parents' Place Of Maryland
www.ppmmd.org
410- 768-9100
- Wide Smiles Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate Resource
www.widesmiles.org
209-942-2812