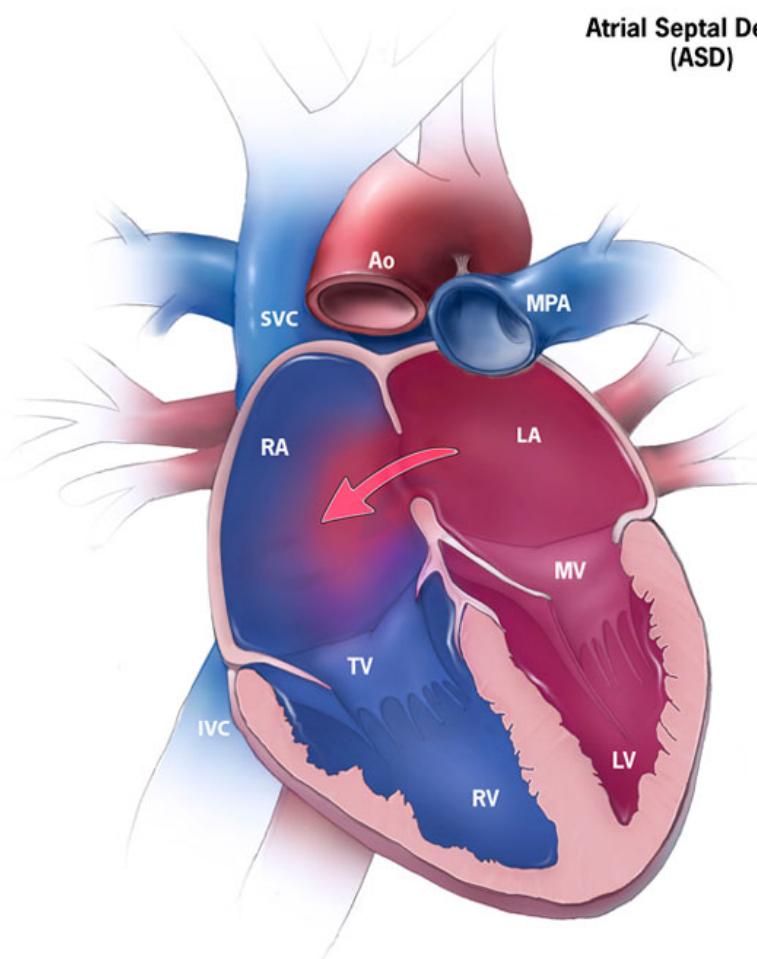


Atrial Septal Defect (ASD)

What is it?

An **atrial septal defect** (pronounced EY-tree-uhl SEP-tuhl) is a type of congenital heart defect. **Congenital** means present at birth. Normally, there are several openings in the wall dividing the upper parts of the heart during pregnancy. The upper parts of the heart are called **atria**.



RA. Right Atrium
RV. Right Ventricle
LA. Left Atrium
LV. Left Ventricle

SVC. Superior Vena Cava
IVC. Inferior Vena Cava
MPA. Main Pulmonary Artery
Ao. Aorta

TV. Tricuspid Valve
MV. Mitral Valve

The wall that separates the **atria** is called a **septum**. These openings in the septum usually close during pregnancy or shortly after birth, but if one of the openings does not close, a hole is left. This hole is called an **atrial septal defect**. The hole increases the amount of blood that flows through the lungs. Over time blood vessels in the lungs may be damaged, which may cause high blood pressure and heart failure. Other problems can include abnormal heartbeat and increased risk of stroke. An atrial septal defect may be seen with other congenital heart defects or alone.

Image courtesy of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities

How common is it?

It's estimated that about 1,966 babies in the U.S. are born with an atrial septal defect each year. This is about 2 per 1,000 live births each year.

What causes it?

The cause of atrial septal defect among most babies is unknown. There may be many factors that cause atrial septal defects, but more research is needed.

How is it diagnosed?

An atrial septal defect may be diagnosed during pregnancy or after birth. Screening tests during pregnancy can check for birth defects. After birth an atrial septal defect can be found if a murmur is heard. Signs and symptoms may not be seen if the hole is small, though. If an atrial septal defect is suspected, a **cardiologist**, a doctor who specializes in heart conditions, will confirm the diagnosis. The cardiologist may perform an echocardiogram, which is a special test to look at the heart, to diagnose an ASD.

How is it treated?

Treatment of an atrial septal defect may vary. The size of the hole typically determines the treatment options. A doctor may want to wait and see if it closes on its own, and medications may be prescribed to help treat any serious symptoms. Surgery may be necessary in some cases. Your child's doctor should discuss these options with you.

For more information:

American Heart Association

http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/CongenitalHeartDefects/AboutCongenitalHeartDefects/About-Congenital-Heart-Defects_UCM_001217_Article.jsp#.Wv2YtPnwbc

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/heartdefects/atrialseptaldefect.html>

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/congenital-heart-defects>

