

Cleft Lip/Cleft Palate

What is it?

Cleft lip occurs when a baby's lip does not form properly during pregnancy. The lip forms between the fourth and seventh weeks of pregnancy. As a baby is developing, tissues that make up the facial features from each side of the head grow toward the center to make the face. A cleft lip happens if the tissue that makes up the lip does not join completely before birth.

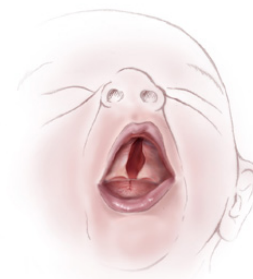
Cleft palate occurs when the baby's mouth does not form properly. Normally, as a baby is developing, the tissues that form the upper lip and palate grow together and eventually fuse. For babies with a cleft lip and/or cleft palate, this fusion does not occur properly. The roof of the mouth (palate) is formed between the sixth and ninth weeks of pregnancy.

Clefts of the lip may be **unilateral** (only one side of the mouth affected) or **bilateral** (both sides affected). Clefts of the palate may affect the front (**hard palate**) or the back (**soft palate**) of the mouth. In addition, a baby may have a cleft lip, a cleft palate, or both.

Children with cleft lip and/or cleft palate may have problems with feeding and speaking. They also can have ear infections, hearing difficulty, and dental problems.



Cleft Lip



Cleft Palate

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

How common is it?

About 16 babies out of every 10,000 birth have a cleft palate, cleft lip, or cleft palate with cleft lip. Cleft lip and/or cleft palate are most commonly seen in people of Asian descent, and boys are more often affected than girls.

What causes it?

The cause of cleft lip and cleft palate for most babies is unknown. There may be many factors that cause it. Smoking, diabetes, and certain medications used during pregnancy can increase the risk of having a baby born with cleft lip and/or cleft palate.

How is it diagnosed?

Cleft lip can be diagnosed during pregnancy. A simple test called an ultrasound can be performed during pregnancy. Cleft lip and cleft palate also can be diagnosed after birth. Some small cleft palates might not be diagnosed until later in life.

How is it treated?

Cleft lip and cleft palate can be surgically treated. The correction of the cleft is usually done in stages. The surgeries must be performed when your child is the correct age and size and in good health. Your child's doctor(s) will discuss appropriate treatment options with you.

For more information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/birthdefects/cleftlip.html>

Cleft Lip and Palate Association

<https://www.clapa.com/what-is-cleft-lip-palate/>