Heart Murmurs and Your Child

What is a heart murmur?
A heart murmur describes an “extra” sound that is heard when the blood is being pumped through your heart. If anything changes the normal flow of the blood, it creates a “swooshing” sound.

Are all murmurs bad?
No. There are two types of murmurs.
- An “innocent” (or “functional”) murmur does not require any type of treatment or cause any problems. Your child can play and take part in sports or other lively activities as normal. No medications are needed.

Most heart murmurs in children are innocent murmurs. Two or three out of every four children will have an innocent murmur heard at some time during their childhood. These murmurs are commonly heard in infants, pre-school children, and teens.

- A “non-innocent” murmurs can be caused by an abnormal structure in the heart or in the heart’s blood vessels or valves. Examples of these would be a “hole in the heart”, a leaking heart valve, or a heart valve that is smaller than normal.

What causes an innocent murmur?
A child’s heart can often beat stronger, faster and louder when they are very anxious, excited, have a fever, or have low red blood cell counts (anemia). The doctor may hear an “extra” sound of blood, or “swooshing” sound, during these times because children have thinner chest walls than adults.

Will we need to get more testing?
If your doctor feels that your child’s murmur needs further testing, they may order:
- An ultrasound (echocardiogram or “echo”) to look at how the blood is moving through your child’s heart
- A chest x-ray to look at the structure of the heart’s structure
- An ECG (electrocardiogram) to make sure that the electrical activity of your child’s heart is working normally.

Your doctor may refer you to a pediatric cardiologist. This is a doctor who has years of extra training and is a specialist in taking care of children with heart problems.

Call your doctor if your child:
- Has a blue-colored tint to their skin
- Has a hard time doing exercise or is short of breath with activity
- Tires more quickly than other children of the same age and size
- If your infant sweats or has a faster rate of breathing, especially during their feedings

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem.