

UNDERSTANDING Ventricular Septal Defect

VSD



What is the ventricular septum?

The heart has four chambers that hold and pump blood. The two lower chambers are the left ventricle and the right ventricle. The **ventricular septum** is the wall between the left ventricle and the right ventricle.

What is a ventricular septal defect?

A **ventricular septal defect**, or **VSD**, is a hole in the wall between the left and right ventricles of the heart. Blood can move through the hole from the left ventricle into the right ventricle. This blood gets pumped back to the lungs instead of out to the body. This makes the lungs and heart work harder than normal.

What are the signs of VSD?

Sometimes the blood moving through the hole in the wall makes a sound known as a heart murmur. A heart murmur can be heard with a stethoscope.

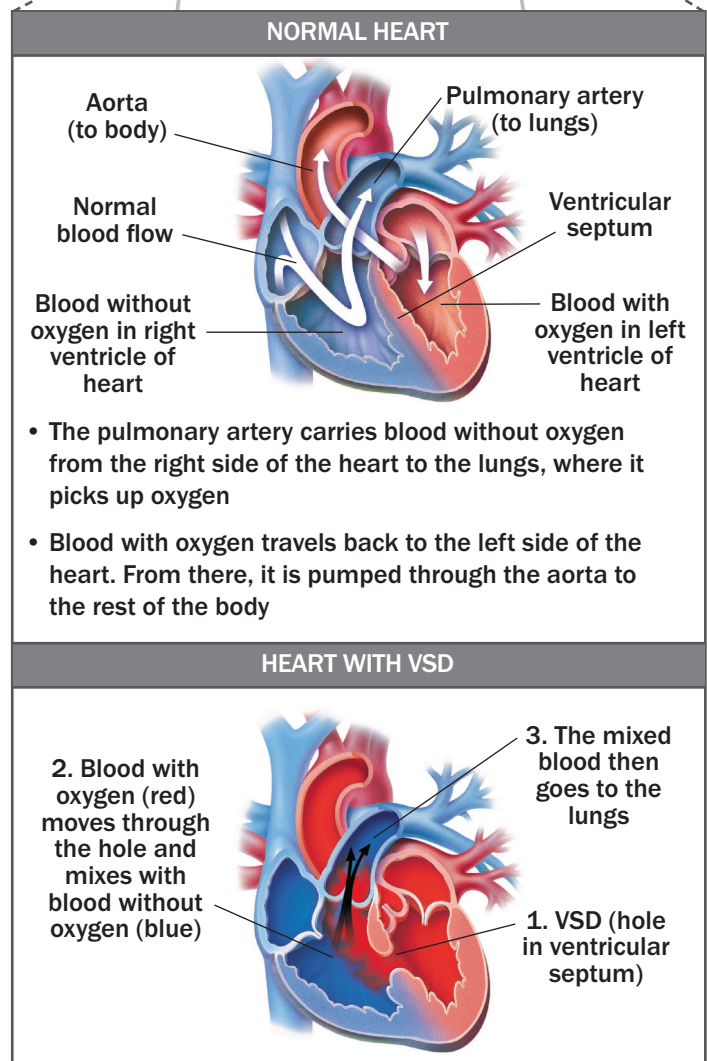
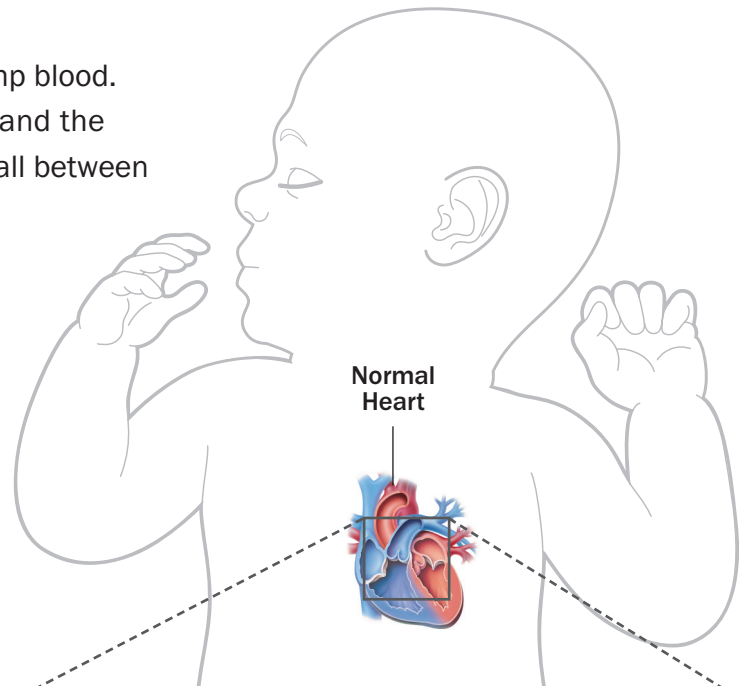
A baby with a VSD may show some or all of these signs:

- Shortness of breath
- Fast or heavy breathing
- Sweating
- Tiredness while feeding
- Poor weight gain

The hole in the septum can cause problems over time if it is not closed. These include a greater chance of heart failure, high blood pressure in the lungs, heart rhythm problems, or stroke.

How common is VSD?

VSD is a **congenital heart defect**. It is present at birth. About 1 in every 240 babies born in the United States each year has VSD.



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How is VSD diagnosed?

Most of the time a VSD diagnosis is made after a baby is born. The doctor may see signs of VSD or hear a heart murmur. The doctor may request an **echocardiogram** test to learn more. This test uses sound waves to show if there is a hole and how big it is. It can also show how much blood is moving through the hole.

How is VSD treated?

Treatment depends on the size of the hole and what problems the baby is having. Often the hole is small and will close on its own.

The baby may need other treatment if the hole is larger. Treatment is based on each baby's needs.

- **Medicine** – Medicine may be used to help make the heart stronger. Medicine may also help to lower blood pressure or help the body get rid of extra water. Medicine does not cure VSD.
- **Cardiac catheter repair** – A cardiac catheter is used in some cases to patch the hole. A cardiac catheter is a long thin tube that the doctor places inside a blood vessel, usually at the groin. The doctor then slides the tube in until it reaches the inside of the heart. A small device at the end of the tube places a patch to close the hole.
- **Surgery** – Some babies will need open-heart surgery to close the hole and help prevent serious problems later on. Sometimes surgery is done within the first few months after birth. Other times the doctor may wait and watch the baby until surgery at a later time.

What will happen next?

After the VSD is closed, the doctor will check a child over time to make sure the hole remains closed. Most children can lead healthy lives after their VSD is closed. Most of the time they do not need medicine or more surgery.

Glossary

Cardiac catheter – A long thin tube that can be guided through a blood vessel to the inside of the heart

Congenital heart defect – a heart problem that is present at birth

Echocardiogram – a test that uses sound waves to help doctors see and diagnose VSD. The short name for this is “echo”

Ventricular septum – the wall between the left ventricle and right ventricle of the heart

VSD (ventricular septal defect) – a hole in the wall between the left ventricle and right ventricle of the heart

Ask the health care team when you have questions—they are there to help.

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