

About your child's cleft lip/vomer flap surgery

This leaflet explains about your child's cleft lip repair/vomer flap surgery. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

Before your child's operation

Why does my child need a cleft lip repair/vomer flap?

Your child is having this operation to repair their cleft lip or front of their palate. We usually do the operation when they are 3 to 6 months old, but some children need to wait until they are a little older.

What should I do to prepare for my child's operation?

To reduce the chance of your child becoming unwell and the operation being cancelled, please minimise contact with other children and avoid busy public places for 2 weeks before and after surgery. Avoid contact with anyone who is unwell. We advise that your child does not have any routine immunisations for 2 weeks before and 2 weeks after the operation.

What happens before the operation?

Your child will go to a pre-admission clinic (face to face, or virtual) to make sure they are ready for surgery. An appointment might be made with an anaesthetist, if needed. A member of the cleft nurse team will contact you to let you know when your child will need to stop drinking and eating before their operation.

What happens on the day of surgery?

You will usually be asked to come into hospital at a time between 7.30am to 11.30am on the day of the operation, this depends on your child's place on the theatre list. A member of the surgical and anaesthetic team will meet with you before the operation. You will be able to go with your child into the anaesthetic room and stay with them until they fall asleep. Your child will generally be away from you for around 3 to 5 hours.

Are there any risks?

Risks of surgery and anaesthetic will be discussed with you before you sign the consent form. Your child will be given antibiotics during the operation to reduce the risk of infection. Every anaesthetic carries a risk of complication. However, this is very small and is reduced by making sure your child is well at the time of surgery. If your child is unwell then your child's surgery might be delayed until they are better. Contact a member of the cleft nurse team if your child is unwell in the 2 weeks before surgery.

After the surgery there is a small risk of bleeding. You may notice blood stained mucous or saliva coming from your child's nose or mouth, and this is common in the first few days after the operation but should settle. If you see bright red bleeding that does not stop within 10 minutes please go straight to your nearest Emergency Department (A&E).

After your child's operation

When can I see my child after the operation?

As soon as your child wakes up from the operation and their condition is stable you will be taken to the recovery unit by a member of the ward nursing team to see them.

How will my child look after the operation?

Your child might look quite different when you first see them. This can feel like a shock. It is normal to feel upset and worried, this tends to get better with time. Your child's lip might look swollen, which will settle. Your child might sound a bit different. Some parents find it hard to see their child's new lip at first, but they usually adjust within a few days.

How will my child feed after the operation?

Your child can feed straight away. If your child feeds from a bottle or cup, please bring it to the recovery unit with you. If you are breastfeeding, you can put your child to the breast. If your child is bottle fed please be aware that they might find it uncomfortable to drink from the bottle at first, so you might want to offer a cup as an alternative. Your child's lip will feel numb because of the local anaesthetic they have been given which may affect feeding.

Will my child be in pain after the operation?

The local anaesthetic given to your child during the operation will make their lip area feel numb for a few hours after the operation, but this will wear off overnight. Your child might need a morphine drip during and after the operation. This is usually stopped the morning after surgery. Your child will be given regular paracetamol and ibuprofen while in hospital and to take home.

How long will my child need to stay in hospital?

You can usually expect to stay 1 to 2 nights in hospital after your child's operation.

When can I take my child home?

The morning after your child's operation they will be reviewed by a member of the cleft team. To be sent home (discharged), your child will need to be eating and drinking around half of their usual intake, and their observations need to be in normal limits. Your child will need to have not needed morphine for 6 hours. Their pain should be managed with paracetamol and ibuprofen.

Is there anything else I should know?

For babies, in accordance with sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) guidelines, we advise against long car journeys wherever possible. We recommend stopping for frequent breaks for feeding and changing your baby's position. It is also advisable to have an adult sit with the baby in the back of the car and that babies should not sleep in a car seat over long periods of time.

How do I care for my child's lip after the operation?

The wound and stitches on your child's lip will be covered by a thin layer of glue which will not need much cleaning after the operation. If you feel the stitches need cleaning, gently clean the area with gauze or cotton buds and cooled boiled water. Allow the area to air dry after cleaning. You will be given yellow soft paraffin before you leave hospital to start applying 2 days before your child's review. Use every 4 hours, as it helps the glue to lift away when the cleft nurse cleans the wound.

How will I manage my child's pain after the operation?

We recommend giving your child paracetamol and ibuprofen regularly, as prescribed, for 4 to 5 days after the operation. It is important to give these medicines regularly to help to reduce pain. After 4 to 5 days reduce the frequency, giving as needed, aiming to stop the medicines about a week after surgery.

Paracetamol: 1 dose every **4 to 6 hours** (maximum of 4 doses in 24 hours)

Ibuprofen: 1 dose every **6 to 8 hours** (maximum of 4 doses in 24 hours)

Suggested schedule:

On waking/breakfast (e.g. 6am)	Paracetamol and ibuprofen
10am	Paracetamol
12 midday	Ibuprofen
2pm	Paracetamol
6pm	Ibuprofen
Before bed (e.g. 8pm)	Paracetamol
In middle of night, if needed	Ibuprofen

Check with nursing staff what time the last doses were given on the ward, so you know when you can give it when you get home. You may also like to keep a diary of when you have given doses.

How will I know if my child has an infection after the operation?

You might notice a change in the appearance of the wound, your child might develop a temperature, or you might notice your child is not behaving like their usual self. Contact your GP or out-of-hours urgent care service for advice, or a member of the cleft nurse team. If there are signs of infection then your GP can prescribe antibiotics.

When will I be seen after the operation?

The cleft nurse team will offer support. If this is your child's first operation they will arrange a post-operative review the week after the operation. Start applying yellow soft paraffin 4 times a day for 2 days before this review to help soften the glue. At this appointment your nurse will try to lift the glue away from the stitches on your child's lip. We recommend giving your child pain relief an hour before your appointment, as the removal of the glue might feel uncomfortable. You will have an appointment to see your cleft surgeon in clinic 6 to 8 weeks after the operation.

How do I care for my child's lip wound once we are home from hospital?

For the first week you do not need to do anything to the wound unless it needs cleaning. If it does, or if the glue comes away sooner than your cleft nurse review, clean the wound with a cotton bud (from a new packet) and cooled boiled water in a rolling down motion. Only if glue has come off or as above in preparation for the cleft nurse review start applying the yellow soft paraffin provided by the ward at least 4 times a day.

Starting from the 7 days after the surgery, we recommend you encourage your child to splash in the bath to get the glue wet, gently start rubbing the stitches away and continue to regularly apply yellow soft paraffin to the area 4 times a day for the next 3 weeks.

If the stitches from your child's lip are still there by 14 days after the surgery, it might be necessary for you to rub with more pressure any remaining stitches on your child's lip to help them come away. Continue to apply yellow soft paraffin at least 4 times a day to your baby's lip after the operation to protect the wound. Swelling may take a few weeks to settle.

When do I start to massage my child's scar?

We advise you start massaging your child's scar from 4 weeks after the operation with any non-perfumed moisturiser. Using a clean index finger work up and down the scar in small circular motions, ideally 1 to 2 times a day as your child allows you (it might be easier when your child is asleep). We recommend continuing with this massage for 18 months to 2 years after the operation. We might discuss using a silicone gel to improve the appearance of the scar. Your child's scar might change over time. It might become red and raised, and often the scar shortens and pulls up. This is all part of normal scar healing and it can take some time for the scar to settle into its final appearance.

Is there anything else I need to do?

It is very important to protect your child's lip from direct sunlight in the coming years as the area is more at risk of sunburn. Try to avoid bright sunlight and protect your child's face from the sun. Remember to apply sunscreen with UVA and UVB SPF factor 50 on the scar to protect it.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact a member of our team.

Katharine Greenway, London **phone** 07884 182756

Emma Burgess, London **phone** 07717 571931

Beverley Willshire, London **phone** 07976 292232

Rebecca Bailey, Kent **phone** 07768 474876

Joanna Leigh, Kent **phone** 07810 483923

Caroline Williams, Surrey/Sussex **phone** 07768 474667

Ruth Mirza, Surrey **phone** 07717 864003

Jackie Matthews, Sussex **phone** 07970 261781

Contact any of the above numbers to talk to the team. Cleft nurse specialists are available between 9am to 5pm. Please note there is a nursing service provided 7 days a week. Phones are diverted to the nurse on-call at weekends and bank holidays. Text messages are not diverted, so please call if you need advice.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, visit **web** www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets

Evelina London Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's medicines, please speak to the staff caring for them or contact our helpline.

t: 020 7188 3003, Monday to Friday, 10am-5pm **e:** letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and Accessible Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111 **w:** 111.nhs.uk

NHS website

Online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing.

w: www.nhs.uk

Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, please get in touch.

t: 0800 731 0319 **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership

Was this leaflet useful?

We want to make sure the information you receive is helpful to you. If you have any comments about this leaflet, we would be happy to hear from you, fill in our simple online form, **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets, or **e:** patientinformationteam@gstt.nhs.uk

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