

Diagnostic Evaluation

Congenital heart defects are often, but not always, diagnosed in infancy. Some may be diagnosed before birth, and many may not be detected until much later in childhood or even in adulthood.

If the heart problem is significant, your child's pediatrician or family physician will likely refer your child to a pediatric cardiologist. Pediatric cardiologists are trained to diagnose and treat heart problems in infants, children and young adults. They have the training and equipment to find out what tests and treatments your child will need, and how often your child will need heart checkups in the future.

Diagnostic Evaluation

Pediatric cardiologists first take your child's medical history and perform a physical exam. They may also order an electrocardiogram (called an EKG or ECG), chest X-ray, or an echocardiogram (ultrasound movie of the heart). These tests are described in more detail below. You can reassure your child that these tests won't hurt. Less often, blood tests are needed, but they're usually not done during a child's first evaluation.

The pediatric cardiology staff will talk to you and your child about each test, but being prepared for the tests will help you to keep your child as comfortable as possible. Don't hesitate to ask the pediatric cardiologist, nurse or technician to explain these tests to you or your child.

Initial Results

After these tests are completed, the doctor will explain the results to you. If you do not understand the results, don't hesitate to ask questions. In some cases, further testing will be needed to fully understand what is going on with your child's heart and to give an accurate diagnosis. These tests include cardiac catheterization and angiography, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), CT scanning, TEE, and special rhythm testing like a Holter recording and stress testing.