

Single Ventricle

What is it?

Single ventricle is a congenital heart defect of the lower chambers of the heart. **Congenital** means present at birth. The heart normally has four chambers: two upper chambers called **atria** and two lower chambers called **ventricles**. A **single ventricle** is when only one ventricle is able to pump blood. Oxygen-rich blood mixes with oxygen-poor blood, and the body does not get enough oxygen-rich blood. Single ventricle is a **critical congenital heart defect**, meaning it can cause serious health problems or even death if left untreated. Babies with single ventricle usually have other heart defects.

How common is it?

Single ventricle is extremely rare. About 5 out of every 10,000 babies is born with single ventricle.

What causes it?

The cause of single ventricle is unknown in most babies. There may be many factors that cause it, but more research is needed to understand the exact cause for it.

How is it diagnosed?

A single ventricle may be diagnosed during pregnancy or after. During pregnancy screenings are done to check for birth defects. If a baby has blue-colored skin and lips, trouble breathing, and poor feeding, those can be signs that he or she has low levels of oxygen in the blood. It also can mean the baby has a heart defect. If a baby experiences symptoms of a heart defect, then the doctor may perform an echocardiogram, a diagnostic test to check for defects in the heart.

How is it treated?

Treatment for a single ventricle usually requires multiple surgeries, typically done over several years. The goal of surgery is to repair the heart to let the ventricle pump oxygenated blood to the body. Your child's doctor should discuss treatment options with you. Regular visits to a **cardiologist**, a doctor who specializes in the heart, will be necessary to watch for any other heart conditions.

For more information:

American Heart Association

http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/CongenitalHeartDefects/AboutCongenitalHeartDefects/About-Congenital-Heart-Defects_UCM_001217_Article.jsp#.WV2YtPnwbc

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/congenital-heart-defects>

