



Understanding Critical Congenital Heart Disease (CCHD)

Information for parents

What Is CCHD?

Critical Congenital Heart Disease (CCHD) is a group of serious heart problems that babies are born with. These conditions affect how the heart works – especially how blood flows to the lungs and body.

Some babies are born with hearts that are missing parts, have holes, or have blood vessels or valves that are too narrow or in the wrong place.

Why Is It Called “Critical”?

The word “critical” means the condition needs attention quickly – usually within the first days or weeks after birth. Without early treatment, CCHD can cause serious illness or even become life-threatening.



How Is It Detected?

Most hospitals and paediatricians in the Cayman Islands check newborns for CCHD with a pulse oximetry test – a small sensor on your baby's hand or foot that checks oxygen levels.

If the oxygen level is too low, more tests (like a heart ultrasound) are done.



Signs To Watch For

Some babies with CCHD may not show symptoms right away. Signs to look for include:



Trouble
breathing or
breathing fast



Poor feeding
or not gaining
weight



Pale or bluish
skin, lips, or
fingers



Being unusually
sleepy or hard to
wake

Treatment Options

Treatment depends on your baby's specific heart problem. Common treatments include:

Medicines: to support the heart and lungs

Heart surgery: to repair defects or improve blood flow

Catheter procedures: less invasive treatments using small tubes

Ongoing care: from a children's heart specialist (cardiologist)

Many children with CCHD will need regular check-ups as they grow.

What's the Outlook?

The good news is that most babies with CCHD can go on to live happy, active lives with the right care. Early detection and modern treatments have greatly improved long-term outcomes.

You're Not Alone

We understand how stressful a CCHD diagnosis can feel. Our team is here to explain everything clearly, answer your questions, and support you and your family when needed.

In the first instance, contact:

Dr Sara Watkin

sara.watkin@caymanheartfoundation.ky