



Oxford University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Cyanotic spells

Information for parents and carers



Children with certain types of heart problems can have what is called a cyanotic (hypercyanotic) or 'blue' spell. A condition in which this is more likely to occur is tetralogy of Fallot.

What happens during a cyanotic spell?

If your child has a heart condition, it can sometimes be harder for blue (deoxygenated) blood to get to the lungs to pick up oxygen. Some of the blue blood may also go through the hole in the heart between the right pumping chamber and left pumping chamber.

The narrower the entrance to the pulmonary artery, the more blue blood goes round the body. This means that the blood being pumped around your child's body may not contain as much oxygen as it should, so they can appear blue (cyanosed).

During a cyanotic spell, more deoxygenated (blue) blood will bypass the lungs, causing an increase in cyanosis.

What is cyanosis?

Cyanosis is a bluish tinge, mostly noticeable on the lips and nail beds.

During a cyanotic spell, your baby's lips and skin will appear more blue than usual and their breathing may be deeper and faster. Your child may initially be very irritable, then may become grey, floppy and unresponsive.

Cyanotic spells can be triggered by the following:

- crying
- pain
- feeding
- having a bowel movement/straining
- dehydration (not having enough fluid)
- a high temperature.

They can also occur soon after waking.

If your baby has a cyanotic heart defect, extra care should be taken during hot weather. Make sure your baby is well hydrated.

If they have vomiting and diarrhoea or develop a high temperature (above 38°C) and this lasts longer than 24 hours, make an appointment for your baby with their GP.

What to do if you think your baby is having a cyanotic spell

- **Keep calm and reassure your baby.**
- **Bring your baby's knees up to their chest. This action increases the pressure of blood returning to the heart from the body and forces blood flow to the lungs.**
- **You can do this with them lying on their back or in your arms, either facing away or towards you.**
- **If the spell lasts longer than 5 minutes or if your baby becomes less alert call 999 and ask for an ambulance.**



It is important to call us for advice if your baby has a cyanotic spell, even if it gets better quickly. These spells can be life threatening if they are left untreated.

Your baby may need to start having medication or may require earlier surgery or intervention.



When to call 999:

- **If the cyanotic spell lasts longer than 5 minutes (if your baby has tetralogy of Fallot, tell the 999 operator).**
- **If your baby becomes floppy and unresponsive or you are unable to wake them up.**
- **If your baby is making a continuous grunting noise, has noisy breathing, is struggling to breathe or is choking.**
- **If your baby's skin colour changes, becomes more blue/grey than usual, is cool to the touch or waxy looking.**

How to contact us

Children's Cardiac Nurse Specialists

Tel: **01865 234 985**

Or **0300 304 7777** and ask for bleep **4170**
(9.00am to 5.00pm, Monday to Friday)

Outside of these hours (evenings, weekends and Bank holidays)
please telephone **Bellhouse-Drayson Ward**.

Tel: **01865 231 247**

01865 231 248

01865 231 237

Ask the staff to speak to the Paediatric Cardiology Consultant on call.

If you need an interpreter or would like this information leaflet in another format, such as Easy Read, large print, Braille, audio, electronically or another language, please speak to the department where you are being seen. You will find their contact details on your appointment letter.

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