

INFECTIVE ENDOCARDITIS PREVENTION

Advice for children and adults with heart abnormalities

*Based on a document from the Children's Heart Service at the John Radcliffe Hospital .
Oxford.*

What is infective endocarditis?

It is an illness in which infection settles inside the heart or great blood vessels. It is most usually caused by bacteria, but fungi and other infective agents can more rarely be the cause. It can occur in people with normal hearts but is much more likely to occur in those with an abnormality of the heart. It is however even so a rare disease.

How does the infection get to the heart?

Infection gets to the heart when bacteria are carried there in the blood stream. Large numbers of bacteria may get into the blood stream in various ways. These include:

- at dental extraction and some other operations
- from infected eczema
- from cuts, grazes, blisters or chicken pox spots that have become septic instead of healing up nicely
- from inflammation and infection around earrings

Ordinary cuts and grazes which heal quickly and cleanly are not a risk, nor is biting ones tongue or lip. Natural loss of milk teeth does not scatter bacteria into the blood and some superficial dental work is no cause for concern. Your dentist will know what procedures matter for your child. Infective carditis is not passed between people.

How can infective endocarditis be prevented?

There are several easy ways to reduce the risk of infective carditis:

- Keep teeth healthy by sensible eating habits and twice daily brushing
- Have regular 6 monthly check-ups by the dentist so that any dental treatment will probably be minor rather than extractions.
- If a dentist removes a tooth or does some deep work on the teeth or gums give antibiotics about one hour beforehand and usually 4-6 hours afterwards. This kills the bacteria round the tooth at just the time they would otherwise be scattered into the blood. Your dentist will know details of what needs to be done.
- Some non dental operations can cause bacteria to be scattered into the blood and require antibiotics to be given.
- Always tell doctors and dentists that your child has a heart abnormality so that they can decide if antibiotics are needed for what they are dealing with. If they are unsure they can contact the Children's Heart Service which is looking after your child.

Does this advice apply to all children and adults with heart abnormalities?

It applies to nearly all, whether or not they have had or will even need surgery. If you are unsure whether it applies to your child please ask the heart doctors looking after you.

The main groups it does not apply to are;

- those with simple atrial septal defects unless they have had it repaired in the previous 3 months.
- those who have had a patent ductus arteriosus closed spontaneously or by surgery more than three months ago.
- many of those who have had a ventricular defect which has closed by itself.