

Coronavirus (COVID-19) – information for children, young people and families from the Cleft Lip and Palate team

We understand that you might be worried about coronavirus – also known as COVID-19 – and the impact of a delay to your child’s planned cleft surgery. This information sheet from the Cleft Lip and Palate team at Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) is for children, young people and families who use our services.

Please read this alongside [national guidance from the Cleft Development Board](#).

You can also find the latest news, information and resources in the GOSH COVID-19 information hub at www.gosh.nhs.uk/covid-19 and our general FAQs for families at gosh.nhs.uk/covid-19-FAQ.

In line with national guidance, we can only carry out life-saving, emergency surgery. We also want to keep you as safe as possible by avoiding travel wherever possible. This means that all cleft operations are postponed at the moment.

Although we cannot yet give you any indication of when we will start operations again, we want to reassure you that as soon as we can, we will give priority to the most urgent cases.

In the meantime, we want to explain the potential impact of delaying surgery and what it might mean for your child.

Information about specific operations

Cleft lip repair

Previously, we have aimed to close a cleft lip when a baby is around three months old, or when they reach their target weight. However, adhering to this timing is not a clinical necessity. We know from our work abroad, with patients of all ages, that the outcome of surgery is good at any age, even adulthood. That means delaying your child’s cleft lip repair should not have a significant detrimental impact on their health.

The only potential downside of delaying surgery is that if baby teeth erupt or come through before cleft lip repair, the teeth and gums nearest the cleft may become drier. If this happens to your



child, you can clean these areas with sterile water and a cotton bud and then put petroleum jelly, such as Vaseline®, onto the gums and teeth to keep them moist.

Cleft palate repair

Previously, we have aimed to close a cleft palate by a baby's first birthday, so that their palate is as normal as possible for when they start to babble. The aim of this was to reduce the need for speech therapy after cleft palate repair, although around half of children who have the operation still need input from a Speech and Language Therapist.

A research study is looking at the outcomes for babies and children who have cleft palate repair at six months or one year. Although the study is ongoing, initial results suggest that there is little difference between repairs carried out at these different ages.

We also know from experience that children who have a later cleft palate repair operation can still achieve normal speech, although they may require speech and language therapy to get them there. Other developmental or physical problems could still affect speech development, even when the cleft palate repair is successful.

The Speech and Language Therapy team have put together an information sheet on things you can do to help your child babble while they are waiting to have cleft palate repair surgery. It is available on our website at www.gosh.nhs.uk/conditions-and-treatments/procedures-and-treatments/speech-and-language-ideas-while-waiting-your-baby-s-cleft-palate-surgery.

The National Literacy Trust has some nice general guidelines and advice on talking to babies and young children. For example: literacytrust.org.uk/resources/tips-talking-your-baby-and-young-child/.

If you are concerned about your child, please contact our Speech and Language Therapists.

Surgery to treat nasal speech

This includes pharyngoplasty and buccinator flap operations. We are prioritising providing these procedures for children with speech errors that require the most speech therapy input. If there is a delay to your child's procedure, we will advise some therapeutic activities for you to do in the meantime.

Alveolar bone graft

For our older patients, alveolar bone grafting is usually carried out between the ages of seven and ten years of age. The precise timing depends on general dental development. This can vary a lot and delays for a few months in the surgery should not greatly impact on the development of your child's teeth.

Some patients will need preliminary work with orthodontic braces. If your child has braces, it is very important that good oral hygiene is maintained in the run up to surgery.

Dental treatment

Dentists across the UK are only providing emergency dental care. This is for your protection as well as the safety of the dental team.

If your child has toothache, you should manage this with over-the-counter pain relief such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, according to the instructions on the bottle or package.

However, if your child is in extreme pain or they have a swelling, contact your local dental surgery to arrange a prescription or further treatment. You should also contact your dentist or GP if your child has trouble swallowing or noisy breathing. You can also access NHS 111 at 111.nhs.uk. In an emergency, you should call 999 or take your child to your nearest A&E as usual.

If your child chips or breaks a tooth, you should contact your local dentist to advise whether this can be addressed later or needs immediate care.



If your child knocks out a tooth, immediately put it back in the socket if you can, then ask your child to bite on a piece of clean cloth. You should then contact your local dentist. If you cannot put the tooth back, put it in some salt water solution (such as contact lens solution) or fresh milk, then contact your local dentist or go to A&E.

Your child should continue to look after their teeth and mouth as usual – brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and avoiding sugary drinks and snacks. When restrictions are lifted and services return to normal, you should book an appointment with your local dentist in the normal way.

Further information is available from the British Dental Association at www.bda.org/advice/Coronavirus/Pages/patients.aspx.

Orthodontic treatment

If your child has braces, they should carry on keeping their mouth and the brace clean by brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, using interdental brushes and mouthwash. Avoiding sugary drinks and snacks too will help prevent damage and staining to the mouth and teeth. This is especially important if there is going to be a delay in getting an orthodontic appointment. Those with a fixed brace should avoid hard, chewy and sticky foods to reduce the risk of a breakage.

If your child has any problems with their teeth or the brace, please contact your clinical team at GOSH. Further information, including videos, is available from the British Orthodontic Society at www.bos.org.uk/COVID19-BOS-Advice/Patients-Advice/FAQ-for-patients-undergoing-orthodontic-treatment-during-COVID-19-pandemic.

Further information and support

Information from the NHS at www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/

Information for children is available on the BBC Newsround website at www.bbc.co.uk/newsround

Jaw, lip and nose surgery for older patients

We usually carry out these operations when your child has finished growing, at the age of 17 years or older. We understand that you might prefer to arrange these procedures during the school holidays, but we cannot guarantee this. We will try to arrange the operation at a convenient time when restrictions are lifted and services return to normal.

Routine clinic appointments

Clinicians are looking to remove the need for patients to attend face-to-face appointments wherever possible. This might involve telephone appointments or exploring video consultations. If your child has an upcoming clinic appointment, we will be in touch with you to discuss how we can best carry this out remotely.

We're here to help

If you have any specific concerns relating to either your child's cleft diagnosis or the impact that the changes to service delivery might have on your child, you might feel it helpful to discuss this further with our Clinical Psychologists.

If so, then please contact any member of the cleft team and ask that they refer you. Consultation will take place over the telephone or through a video call. You will need to register with the MyGOSH app to have a video call – details of how to sign up are online at www.gosh.nhs.uk/your-hospital-visit/mygosh.



