

# CLEFT LIP AND CLEFT PALATE

## WHAT IS A CLEFT CONDITION?

Cleft lip and cleft palate are among the most widely known craniofacial anomalies. A cleft is a gap in the mouth that didn't close during the early stages of pregnancy.



## HOW OFTEN DOES CLEFT OCCUR?

It is estimated that worldwide, a child is born every 3 minutes with a cleft, about one in 500-750 births. Data on the frequency for oral clefts are still lacking for many parts of the world — studies are ongoing.

## CAUSES OF CLEFT

Many risk factors can increase the likelihood of birth defects. While some causes are still unknown, genetics and family history, pre-existing medical conditions, poor nutrition and exposure to harmful environmental substances can affect the healthy development of a baby.

## LIVING WITH CLEFT

Infants with cleft lip or cleft palate might not have other birth anomalies and are otherwise healthy. Depending on the type and severity, a cleft can create serious health issues if it is not corrected.

- Difficulty with feeding, which in some parts of the world can lead to malnutrition or even starvation
- Recurring ear infections can occur and lead to hearing loss
- Dental development can be affected
- Speech and language development can also be impaired
- Children may also suffer from bullying and social isolation





## HEALING A CHILD'S CLEFT

With surgery, a child suffering from a cleft lip or cleft palate can have a brand-new, beautiful smile. In an ideal situation, a pediatrician and a plastic surgeon work with a child's parents soon after the child's birth to choose the best timing for surgery.

Most doctors agree that a cleft lip should be repaired by the time a baby is three months old and that a cleft palate should be repaired between the ages of 12 and 18 months.

For many families in developing countries, early surgery may not be an option, due to lack of financial resources, qualified medical staff and other factors. Since 1982, Operation Smile has been dedicated to finding these families and providing them with surgery so they can live happy healthy lives.