



## Palate examination: Identification of cleft palate in the newborn, a guide for parents and carers

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British Association of Perinatal Medicine  
Cleft Lip and Palate Association  
Royal College of General Practitioners  
Royal College of Midwives  
Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health  
The Craniofacial Society of Great Britain and Ireland

**RCPCH**  
Royal College of  
**Paediatrics and Child Health**  
*Leading the way in Children's Health*

## 1. Understanding the best practice guide

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) has developed this guide for parents and carers so you can understand what healthcare professionals will be looking for when your baby has a palate examination.

The RCPCH has developed guidance for healthcare professionals on how to examine a baby's roof of the mouth, known as the palate, to help them check everything is normal. The guidance helps healthcare professionals to examine a baby's palate correctly and detect if there are any abnormalities, such as a cleft palate. A cleft palate is when the roof of the mouth has not joined completely. This can happen without a cleft of the lip, which is why it is important to look in the mouth.

It is important to remember that this information does not include what you as a parent or carer should do if a cleft palate is detected or any information about further treatments that might be suitable.

## 2. What is cleft palate?

The palate is the roof of your mouth. A cleft palate is when the roof of the mouth has not joined completely, leaving a hole which can affect feeding. A thorough palate examination is important to ensure that if a baby does have a cleft palate then this is identified early as delayed detection can affect a baby's growth, development and treatment.

You can find out more about cleft palate here: [www.clapa.com](http://www.clapa.com)

## 3. When should my baby have their palate examined?

All babies should have their palate examined by a healthcare professional to check for any abnormalities. Health professionals should examine a

baby's palate as part of the full newborn physical examination, which is usually carried out within 72 hours after a baby is born. The healthcare professional should carry out the palate examination and record this in your baby's child health record.

#### **4. How will the doctor, midwife or nurse know if my baby has cleft palate?**

Healthcare professionals will carry out a visual examination of your baby's palate to check your baby's palate is normal. The best way to do this is by using a torch and pressing down the baby's tongue so the whole of the baby's palate can be seen. The RCPCH are developing an educational tool to help teach healthcare professionals in how to correctly examine a baby's palate so in future all babies with cleft palate are detected at an early stage.

#### **5. What if my baby's mouth can't be examined?**

If, for any reason, your healthcare professional cannot fully examine your baby's palate then you will be told. This does not necessarily mean there is something wrong with your baby's palate and if this happens your healthcare professional will make sure that another attempt to examine your baby's palate is made within 24 hours, or as early as possible after that.

#### **6. What if my baby is diagnosed with cleft palate?**

Most babies' palates will be fine, but if your baby is found to have a cleft palate then your healthcare team will provide you with advice and support on the treatment options available to you, and your local cleft centre will be contacted. If you are worried please speak to your healthcare team.

If you would like to read the full cleft palate guidance for healthcare professionals this can be found on the RCPCH website:

[www.rcpch.ac.uk](http://www.rcpch.ac.uk)

For more information about cleft palate you can:

- Visit the Cleft Lip and Palate Association's website: [www.clapa.com](http://www.clapa.com)
- Contact [clinical.standards@rcpch.ac.uk](mailto:clinical.standards@rcpch.ac.uk)