Understanding Cardiac Catheterization

Doctor performing the procedure:

The doctor and/or nurse talked with me, but I still have questions (write them here):

Our pediatric cardiac catheterization team looks forward to caring for your child.

American Family Children's Hospital

The staff at American Family Children's Hospital is committed to providing the highest level of care to your child. It is important to us that you understand the plan for your child's stay, so we want you to ask questions. Please let the team members know if you would like a visit with a Child Life specialist, a social worker or a chaplain from Spiritual Care Services while you are here.

American Family Children’s Hospital
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Pediatric Cardiology Clinic: (608) 263-6420
Why does your child need a cardiac catheterization?
A cardiac catheterization is a procedure used to both diagnose and treat congenital heart disease. It provides information used to decide if there is a need for medicines or surgery. Interventions can also be done during a cardiac catheterization to treat problems that may have needed surgery. The cardiologist doing the procedure will go over the plan in detail and answer any questions you may have. If you are not sure about what is going to happen during the catheterization, please ask questions. It is our job to make sure you are comfortable with the care plan for your child before the procedure.

What is the Cath Lab?
Also known as the catheterization lab, it is a place where cardiac catheterizations are performed.

How is a catheterization done?
A cardiac catheterization is a procedure which involves threading a thin flexible tube (catheter) through the arteries and veins of the heart and lungs, often from the groin (see illustration). With the use of X-ray and contrast dye, the procedure team can define structure and function of the heart and lungs. This information is then used to determine the best therapies for treating congenital heart disease. We call that a diagnostic catheterization. If the doctor is also going to treat a type of congenital heart disease during the procedure, it is called an interventional catheterization. A number of interventions can be performed in the cath lab.

Is it painful?
Most cardiac catheterizations done in children with congenital heart disease are performed with general anesthesia. You will meet with a dedicated pediatric cardiac anesthesiologist before the procedure who will review your child’s medical history to make sure anesthesia is safe and effective. The anesthesiologist will monitor your child during the entire procedure. Your child will sleep through the procedure without pain or anxiety. After the procedure, there may be slight discomfort at the insertion sites. Pain medicines are given as needed. Pain management is a priority at American Family Children’s Hospital, and you can expect pain to be treated and controlled during the hospital stay. We also have a dedicated team of Child Life specialists experienced in supporting and distracting children during hospital visits. If support from a Child Life specialist would be helpful for your child, please let us know so it can be arranged ahead of time.

How long does a catheterization take?
Usually, there is at least a two- to three-hour wait from the time your child leaves for the procedure until you are reunited in the recovery area or in an inpatient room at American Family Children’s Hospital. The cath lab team, along with the recovery room or inpatient nurse, will let you know where to wait and when you can come into the room, once your child is settled after the procedure.

Where do I wait during the procedure?
At the start of the catheterization, staff will bring family members and guests to the Cath lab waiting room. Cath lab staff will be available during this time to assist you, and food and restrooms are either in or near these areas while you wait. During the procedure, cath lab team members will give you frequent updates about the progress of the catheterization.