

7 QUESTIONS PARENTS SHOULD ASK EVERY PEDIATRIC HEART CENTER

1 What is the institutional case volume for congenital heart surgery?

The more frequently a surgeon performs a particular procedure, the more opportunity he or she has to develop those skills. Pay attention to the overall case volume AND the case volume for the specific procedure your child needs. A center is considered to have a "high volume" of cases if it performs at least 250 surgeries a year.

Notes:

2 How many congenital heart surgeons are there at the institution?

More surgeons = more expertise and more sub-specialties. When multiple surgeons collaborate, patients receive the best possible care. A larger staff also ensures ample coverage for patients post-surgery. You may also have more choice when it comes to a surgical date.

3 Is there a dedicated Pediatric Cardiac ICU?

A dedicated Pediatric Cardiac ICU assures that your child will be closely monitored by experts who are trained to care for the unique needs of infants and children coming out of heart surgery. They are specially equipped with pediatric devices and monitors that ensure immediate help is always available.

4 Is there a pediatric cardiac intensivist in the hospital 24/7?

As pediatric cardiac interventions improve and become more commonplace, the demand for pediatric cardiac intensive care also increases. A designated intensivist in the Pediatric Cardiac ICU 24/7 means there is always someone immediately available to care for your child during the often turbulent recovery period.

5 Is there a dedicated pediatric anesthesia team?

Anesthesia and pain management are particularly important when it comes to children with heart conditions. Children respond to anesthesia differently than do adults, and need an extra level of care. Pediatric cardiac anesthesiologists are specially trained to treat this unique subset of patients.

6 Does the program participate in the Society of Thoracic Surgeons (STS) database?

The STS Congenital Heart Surgery Database is the largest database of its kind in North America. Participating in the STS database allows individual institutions to compare their outcomes with national aggregate data. Checking this database will help YOU understand how well a specific hospital is performing against the national average.

7 For the severity of the heart disease that your child has (STAT level), is the observed mortality rate below the expected mortality rate?

Each child is unique and may have multiple conditions that make interventions more or less complex. The STS rates every kind of congenital heart procedure on a difficulty scale of 1-5 called "STAT levels." For every hospital that participates, STS generates an expected mortality rate based on the type of procedure and complexity levels of the patient population. If an institution's mortality rate is equal to or lower than the STS projection, the program is performing very well.

