

New UCLA Children's Heart Center serves as a hub for pediatric and congenital heart programs



Children of all ages with known or suspected heart disease can now be seen in the newly opened UCLA Children's Heart Center, which provides the full spectrum of care in one central location.

As the outpatient hub for the UCLA pediatric and congenital heart programs, the center provides care for patients from prenatal care through adolescence. The center also collaborates closely with the adjacent Ahmanson/UCLA Adult Congenital Heart Disease Center, providing seamless continuity of cardiac care into adulthood.

Pediatric cardiologists treat patients with all forms of structural congenital and acquired heart disease, from those with minor defects such as ventricular or atrial septal defects to those with major heart disease, such as single ventricle or transposition of the great arteries. Highly specialized cardiologists also treat acquired heart disease, such as myocarditis resulting from viral infection; arrhythmias, such as supraventricular and ventricular tachycardia; and neurogenic/vasovagal syncope, or fainting.

Some patients require ongoing multidisciplinary care, and having all services in one location allows the healthcare team to provide specialized treatments while minimizing waiting times and multiple appointments. Patients and their families have access to not only a team of specialized physicians and nurses, but also specially trained sonographers, nurse practitioners, social workers and dietitians.

Family-friendly services

In addition to providing the best care under one roof, the UCLA Children's Heart Center strives to provide an environment where children and families feel comfortable and at ease. This includes having natural lighting and a play area in the waiting room, and featuring colorful artwork by famed artist/cartoonist Chuck Jones throughout the center. Social workers are also available to help families find community services, provide additional education to parents and siblings, and teach teens how to manage their illness as they enter adulthood.

"We recognize that everyone who comes in through these doors — both patients and their families — has a fair amount of emotional stress," says Mark Sklansky, MD, chief of the UCLA Division of Pediatric Cardiology. "The center enables us to provide state-of-the-art healthcare in a warm, compassionate setting that's tailored to pregnant women, babies, young children, adolescents and their families."

Leading experts in prenatal and neonatal testing

Each year, about one in 100 babies in the United States is diagnosed with congenital heart disease. Early intervention is critical in many of these cases, yet only a fraction of these infants are diagnosed prenatally, and many even elude neonatal detection.

UCLA's prenatal diagnosis program has grown to be one of the largest programs of its kind in Southern California. Postnatally, an integrated team of specialists in pediatric cardiology perform full diagnostic workups and evaluations on site, providing expertise in areas such as genetic screening, pulmonary hypertension, pediatric electrophysiology, noninvasive imaging, and pediatric heart failure and heart transplantation. UCLA has the largest pediatric heart transplant and cardiomyopathy program in the Southwestern U.S.

UCLA fetal cardiology experts lead national educational efforts to improve early detection, and UCLA has long been a strong proponent of providing routine neonatal pulse oximetry screening following delivery, which is now being offered throughout California. This screening can identify some newborns with critical congenital heart defects, which account for about 25 percent of all congenital heart defects. Many such structural heart defects are associated with hypoxemia — oxygen deficiency in arterial blood — and typically require some type of intervention or surgery. Without early detection and appropriate treatment, many of these infants are at high risk of death.

Physicians in the UCLA Children's Heart Center are able to see ill patients immediately — scheduling same- or next-day appointments when available and beginning treatments at once. And because our physicians are committed to providing timely care for all patients, even those presenting with more common symptoms including heart murmur, palpitations and chest pain can be scheduled to be seen within 24 to 48 hours.

Advanced technology and a maternal-fetal suite on site

The center offers state-of-the-art prenatal echocardiography, including first, second and third trimester 2D and 3D imaging; pediatric and stress echocardiography; electrocardiography and 24-hour Holter and event recorders; pacemaker interrogation and programming; and exercise and autonomic testing. Pediatric cardiologists evaluate patients for palpitations, dizziness and fainting, and provide sports-medicine and pre-participation athletic screening. Patients requiring invasive testing and interventional cardiac catheterization — which helps to avoid open-heart surgery — have immediate access to UCLA pediatric cardiology specialists, who are national leaders in the development of minimally invasive transcatheter techniques.

If babies are expected to need heart catheterization or surgery soon after birth, mothers can deliver at Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center. Delivering babies in the same facility where neonatal surgery and cardiac catheterization are performed not only avoids subjecting fragile infants to the delay, stress and risk associated with hospital transport, but also allows mothers to stay near their critically ill newborn children.

Mattel Children's Hospital 

Participating Physicians

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