
CHRONIC LUNG DISEASE OF PREMATURITY (CLD)

What is CLD?

Chronic lung disease of prematurity is the result of children who have been born very prematurely. It refers to a kind of scarring of the lungs. The problem can affect all parts of the lung: the large airways (bronchi) the smaller airways (the bronchioles) the alveoli (which get oxygen into the blood) and the blood vessels.

Who gets CLD?

The more premature a child, or the lower the birth weight, the more likely they are to develop CLD.

What causes it?

The exact cause is unknown. It is thought to be due to a range of factors including:

- the immaturity of the child's lungs
- ventilation
- oxygen
- delays in the body's change in the circulatory system after birth
- infection
- dietary factors.

Since there are many factors, it is very hard to prevent.

How will it affect my child's health?

In some children their CLD is so severe that they cannot survive. The vast majority have a slow recovery phase. This may mean they need to be in oxygen for many weeks, or even months. In the rarest occasions children need to be in oxygen for several years.

Children with CLD are more at risk of serious problems from chest infections. Some infections are relatively benign for children without CLD, but can be very serious for those with CLD. As a general guide, a child with severe CLD is much more likely to need to be on an Intensive Care Unit when they get other chest infection, than a child born without preterm respiratory problems.

If a child has CLD, they may well have other health problems which are not caused by the CLD, but which are also due to being born preterm, or at very low birth weight. These include airway problems, developmental delay, visual problems, hearing problems, gut and nutritional problems.

How can these problems be treated?

There is no "cure" for CLD i.e. no medicine that will remove the scarring, and make the lungs normal. The best way to overcome CLD is to ensure your child grows well. This may require adding extra calories to your child's feeds, or even feeding overnight via a tube passing into the stomach.

In addition, medicines like steroids, ventolin, diuretics and antibiotics can sometimes help to control symptoms.

Why does my child need to see a Respiratory Specialist?

Your child's General Paediatrician may have asked us to see your child to advise on the best means to manage your child's chest problems. This doesn't mean your child will no longer be cared for by their General Paediatrician, but rather that the Respiratory team will also support your child.

This information sheet is produced to answer some of the questions parents ask about chronic lung disease of prematurity (CLD). It is not intended to replace discussion with your child's Respiratory Specialist and you are encouraged to discuss your child's condition with the specialists when you attend clinic.