



# Tet Spells

## (Cyanotic 'Blue' Spells)

### What is a Tet Spell?

A Tet Spell describes a short period when a child's skin turns a little blue. They usually last less than 1 minute. Tet spells can be caused by certain heart defects. Children who have Tet Spells often have the 'Tetralogy of Fallot' heart defect (which is why the spells are 'tet' spells). Not all children who are normally 'blue' (cyanotic) because of a heart problem are at risk for Tet Spells. Your Cardiologist or Nurse will tell you if your child is at risk for these spells.

### What causes Tet Spells?

Tet Spells happen when blood flow to the lungs is decreased. Less blood to the lungs means that less oxygen is getting picked up in the blood. Blood with lots of oxygen is bright red, while blood with less oxygen is darker, and bluish in colour. The blood with less oxygen causes the skin to have a blue tinge to it.

There are a number of things that can decrease blood flow to the lungs (causing a Tet Spell):

- Crying;
- Having a bowel movement (poop!);
- Waking up from a nap;
- Having a fever;
- Taking a bath;
- Being stressed or very worried;
- Being dehydrated (not having enough fluids).

### How will I know if my child is having a Tet Spell?

During a Tet Spell, your child may:

- Begin to breathe faster and deeper.
- Turn blue (especially the lips, mouth, face and fingernails). South Asian, African or Caribbean Canadian children will have very pale or gray skin with a blue tinge.
- Become irritable, restless or look uncomfortable.
- Faint (pass out).

## Taking care of a child during a Tet Spell

Tet Spells can be frightening for both children and their parents, but they usually last less than 1 minute. If your child has a Tet Spell:

1. Remain calm, do not panic.
2. Turn your child on his side or back.
3. Bring your child's knees up to touch the chest.
4. Some children will automatically squat during a tet spell. This is their way of bringing their knees to their chest on their own.
5. Comfort your child by touching or cuddling.
6. Make sure that you can see your child's face to watch for:
  - Skin colour changes;
  - How alert your child is;
  - How long the spell lasts.





## Call 911 or bring your child to the Emergency Department if:

- Your child faints
- The spell lasts longer than a few minutes
- Your child has trouble breathing.



## Call the Cardiology Nurses Line if:

- It is your child's first Tet spell;
- Your child is having more Tet spells than usual;
- You have questions or concerns, and would like advice.

### How to reach us:

Call 613-737-7600 extension 3109, and leave a **non-urgent message**.

If you call Monday-Friday from 9:00 am - 3:30 pm, we will call you back the same day. If you call during the evening or weekend, we will call you back on the next working day.

During evenings and weekends, you can also call 613-737-7600 extension 0, and ask to speak to the cardiologist on call.

## Will my child always have tet spells?

This depends on your child's heart defect. Surgery for Tetralogy of Fallot heart defects can improve blood flow to the lungs. Most children who complete these surgeries will no longer have tet spells. Your Cardiologist or Nurse will tell you about your child's risk for tet spells.

