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If you have any questions, queries, or require more information, please contact the department:

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Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)

8.30 am to 4.30 pm

An out-of-hours answering machine is available

## Pharyngoplasty

The Welsh Centre for Cleft Lip and Palate

Speech and Language Therapy

Morrison Hospital

Swansea

[www.wales.nhs.uk/cleft-team](http://www.wales.nhs.uk/cleft-team)

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## **Pharyngoplasty surgery**

This leaflet has been designed to help you understand the reasons for this surgery and will help to further explain the procedure.

### **What is a pharyngoplasty?**

A pharyngoplasty decreases the size of the pharynx (space behind the palate) by repositioning the muscles of the pharynx. The surgery will decrease the size of the pharynx to approximately the size of the tip of the little finger and will help to prevent air from coming down the nose during speech. The operation will take about one to two hours and will be carried out under general anaesthetic. Pain relief will be given after the operation if required.

### **Why is a pharyngoplasty needed?**

The cleft surgeon and the speech and language therapist have identified that the soft palate (soft part of the roof of the mouth) and pharynx (back of the throat) do not work well enough to allow sounds to be produced correctly.

The soft palate and the pharynx have an important role in speech production as they close off the nose from the mouth during speech. Most sounds that are produced in speech are made with the nose cavity closed off. All the air from the lungs exits the mouth allowing 'oral' sounds to be produced, for example, 'p, b ,t ,d, k, g, f, v, s, z, sh, ch and j'.

In addition to this there are three sounds, 'm, n, and ng', made when air passes into the nose. These sounds are called 'nasals'.

### What are the possible consequences?

There are possible small side effects such as snoring or hyponasality (sounding like you have a cold all of the time). Very rarely sleep apnoea (breath-holding at night) can develop which may require further surgery. Please speak to the cleft surgeon if you would like to discuss these risks in more detail.

### What happens after the surgery?

After the operation there is some discomfort, similar to a sore throat. You/your child will be given painkillers for this. You/your child will be in hospital until the day after surgery, or until a sufficient amount of food and drink can be taken.

Patients will be seen approximately six weeks after the surgery by the cleft surgeon (change to Specialist Cleft Nurse at Nurse led clinic) to ensure the pharyngoplasty is healing. Until this appointment with the cleft surgeon (change to Specialist Cleft Nurse, advice will be given to avoid rough and sharp-edged foods at all times, such as toast, crisps, nuts and biscuits. Further dietary advice will be given on the ward after the operation. A week off school/work is usually advised.

If you/your child was attending speech and language therapy before the operation this can recommence once you/your child feel(s) well enough to attend. In the first six weeks following surgery speech may sound different as a result of the pharyngoplasty healing.

Patients will then be assessed by a speech and language therapist at Morriston Hospital six months after the surgery to monitor progress.

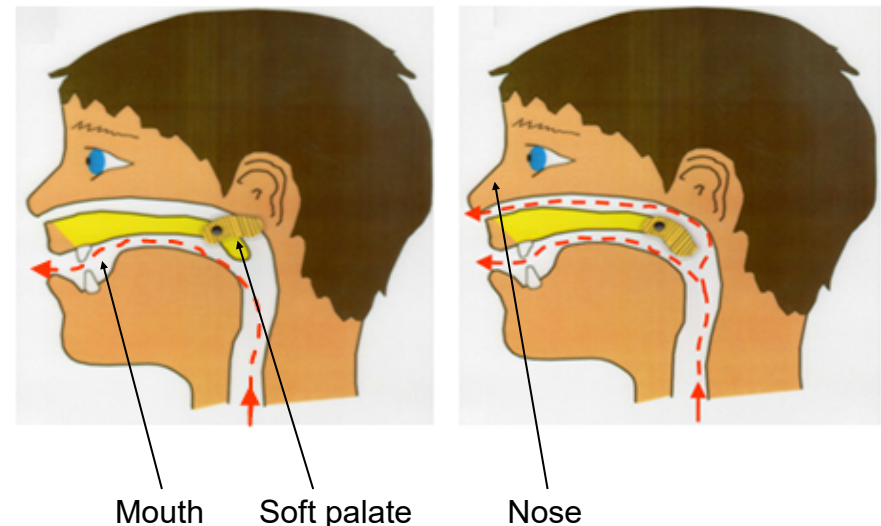
A pharyngoplasty is needed if the soft palate and pharynx do not work well enough to stop air flowing into the nose during speech, so speech sounds 'nasal'.

#### Oral speech

Soft palate working well enough to close off the nose

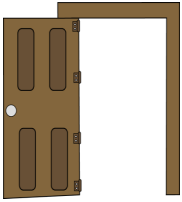
#### Nasal speech

Soft palate not working well enough to close off the nose



(Images from Harland and Bowden 1997)

You/your child may have had or require a special x-ray (videofluoroscopy) or camera test (nasendoscopy) to investigate this further and the results will be discussed with you. Speech and language therapy alone will not improve how the soft palate and pharynx work.



For example, think of a door and its frame - the frame (the pharynx) is too big for the door (the soft palate) so the door cannot close properly and air leaks through and out of the nose.

### What if there has been previous surgery for speech, for example, a palate re-repair?

Previous surgery was designed to increase the movement and length of the palate but, despite the palate moving well, the pharynx is too large. This means that air is still coming out of the nose when talking. As a result, speech may still have a 'nasal' quality. The previous surgery was required, but it alone is not enough to help and surgery in the form of a pharyngoplasty is now needed.

### What does a pharyngoplasty look like?

When you look at the back of the mouth after surgery, you may notice a hole about the diameter of the tip of your little finger. Please do not be alarmed by this. This is the pharyngoplasty (where the pharynx has been made smaller).

Sometimes, initially you cannot see the pharyngoplasty, but as the muscles heal and settle it may become easier to see, this is considered normal. In some cases, you cannot see the pharyngoplasty at all and this is also normal.

### The mouth may look like this after the pharyngoplasty surgery:



Pharyngoplasty

### Where will the operation take place and how will I find out the date?

The operation is usually carried out in Morriston Hospital. You will receive a letter or a phone call confirming the date of the operation.

### Will the operation work?

In almost all cases the pharyngoplasty will allow the pharynx to close during speech, making speech sound less 'nasal'. There is a small chance that air will still come down the nose during speech and, if this is the case, further possible treatment options will be discussed with you.