

HealthyLiving

CONNECTING WITH OUR PATIENTS AND OUR COMMUNITY

New Division of Pediatric Cardiology Offers Comprehensive Congenital Heart Care... *for Every Stage of Life*

Families across New Jersey – and beyond – now have greater access to specialized care for children and adults born with congenital heart conditions. The Children's Hospital at Saint Peter's has launched a new Division of Pediatric Cardiology, offering comprehensive congenital heart care close to home.

The new pediatric cardiology program includes several very experienced team members. Leading the program is Rajiv Verma, MD, a pediatric interventional cardiologist board-certified in pediatric cardiology and adult congenital heart disease. With more than 30 years of experience, Dr. Verma brings deep clinical expertise and a strong commitment to serving families throughout the region.

Comprehensive Congenital Heart Care Close to Home

Congenital heart disease refers to heart conditions that are present at birth. It is one of the most common types of birth defects. Some children may need only monitoring, while others may require medication, catheter-based procedures, or surgery.

"Our pediatric cardiology program focuses on the quality of care and leveraging new technologies to provide advanced treatments for congenital heart disease without open-heart surgery, when possible," said Dr. Verma.

The new cardiology program at Saint Peter's is designed to provide coordinated heart care for patients at every stage of life. Services include:

- **Fetal echocardiography** for expectant mothers who may be at increased risk of having a baby with a heart condition. If a concern is identified before birth, the care team works closely with obstetricians and maternal-fetal medicine specialists to plan a safe delivery and immediate follow-up. When a fetal heart concern is detected, early diagnosis helps families and physicians prepare for delivery and any care the baby may need after birth.
- **Newborn and pediatric consultations** to evaluate, diagnose, and manage all forms of congenital heart disease, no matter how complex. The physicians also provide cardiac consultation for children with suspected or confirmed acquired heart conditions such as Kawasaki disease, myocarditis, pulmonary hypertension, and recurrent fainting.



Comprehensive Congenital Heart Care *(continued)*

- **Adult congenital heart care** for individuals who were born with heart defects and continue to need specialized follow-up care into adulthood. More than half of Dr. Verma's patients are adults living with congenital heart disease, a population that often struggles to find ongoing specialized cardiac care.
- **Cardiac evaluation during pregnancy** for women who themselves had congenital heart disease as children. These women require additional cardiac evaluation during pregnancy to ensure their heart function is stable and to help guide their delivery. This is an important aspect of care for adults with congenital heart disease that will be introduced for the first time at Saint Peter's.
- **Exercise testing and pulmonary function testing** to provide additional assessment of the cardiac functional state of children and adults with congenital heart disease.

Saint Peter's pediatric cardiology team cares for patients in both outpatient and hospital settings, allowing for evaluation, treatment, and follow-up within a single program. Patients may be referred for a variety of reasons, including heart murmurs, abnormal screening results, symptoms such as chest pain or fainting, or known congenital heart conditions that require ongoing management.

"Congenital heart conditions can affect patients of all ages. Our program ensures that children and adults receive consistent, sophisticated care without having to travel far from home. From diagnosis to ongoing management, our team is here to guide each patient every step of the way," said Dr. Verma. "It's especially important for us to support our patients as they transition from pediatric to adult care."

Rajiv Verma, MD

Advanced Treatment Options

Treatment for congenital heart disease depends on the type and severity of the condition. Some children require only careful monitoring with regular checkups and imaging. Others may need medication to support heart function or control symptoms. For more complex conditions, interventional procedures, or surgery may be necessary.

One important tool in modern congenital heart care is cardiac catheterization. This procedure allows physicians to examine the heart from the inside using thin, flexible tubes inserted through a blood vessel, usually in the leg. Cardiac catheterization can be used to measure pressures within the heart, evaluate blood flow, and gather detailed information that helps guide treatment decisions. In many cases, this testing avoids the need for more invasive surgery.

In certain situations, catheter-based techniques can also be used to treat heart defects. These minimally invasive procedures allow physicians to repair specific structural problems, such as closing small holes between heart chambers or opening narrowed blood vessels, without open-heart surgery. Because the chest does not need to be opened, recovery time is often shorter, and children are frequently able to return home within a day.

Some children and adults will require surgical repair performed at specialized cardiac centers. When surgery is needed, care is coordinated with experienced surgical programs. After the procedure, patients return to Saint Peter's for continued monitoring and follow-up care when medically appropriate.

A Commitment to Quality

"Dr. Verma's career has been defined by a commitment to high-quality care for all patients," said Siva Jonna, MD, chair, Department of Pediatrics, and physician-in-chief of The Children's Hospital at Saint Peter's. "He cares for families from diverse communities and believes that every child deserves the same level of attention and expertise. By combining experience, access, and a patient-centered approach, The Children's Hospital at Saint Peter's is expanding its role as a trusted resource for heart care in New Jersey."



To schedule an appointment with Dr. Verma, call 732.339.7460.

Adult Emergency Department Earns Certified Autism Center™ Designation

The Robert and Joan Campbell Adult Emergency Department at Saint Peter's University Hospital has achieved certification as a Certified Autism Center™ (CAC) through The International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES). This recognition highlights the hospital's commitment to providing high-quality, inclusive care for adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and sensory sensitivities. The Children's Hospital at Saint Peter's, which includes the Dorothy B. Hersh Pediatric Emergency Department, is also a certified autism center.



To earn this designation, all adult emergency department clinicians completed a 14-hour autism-specific training course, which includes an exam and a site visit from the IBCCES team. The program equips healthcare professionals with the knowledge and skills to better understand the communication styles, sensory needs, and behavioral cues of autistic patients. This training helps staff reduce stress and create a more supportive, patient-centered environment in the emergency department.

The adult emergency department has implemented several key features to improve the experience of autistic patients, including:

- Calming Aquarium Display:**
 A tube-shaped aquarium with gently moving plastic fish and soft water sounds provides a soothing visual environment that helps reduce anxiety, support emotional regulation, and manage sensory overload.
- Interactive Sensory Projector:**
 Engaging, movement-based activities offer structured distraction during wait times. Patients can participate independently or with a caregiver, releasing energy in a controlled way while practicing self-regulation and focus.
- Personalized Fidget Menu:**
 A selection of sensory items allows patients to choose what works best for them. With different sizes, textures, and movement types, this empowers patients to self-regulate and feel more comfortable during their visit.



"Visiting an emergency department can be stressful and scary for both patients and their families. Achieving Certified Autism Center™ status reflects our dedication to providing safe, inclusive, and compassionate care for adults with autism," said Janine Brys, MSN, RN, FN-CSA, CEN, nurse manager of Adult Emergency Services at Saint Peter's University Hospital. "We are proud to offer an environment where patients and their families feel understood and supported, even in a high-stress setting."

To learn more about Saint Peter's adult emergency department, visit saintpetershcs.com/emergencydept.



The Emergency Department at Saint Peter's offers multiple ways for patients with autism to self-regulate and manage sensory overload.

Diabetes Education*



For information about classes, call the numbers listed below.

Diabetes Self-Management Education

Call for information: 732.339.7630

Gestational Diabetes Self-Management Education

Call for information: 732.339.7630

Prevent T2 Program

Call for information and registration: 732.339.7772



Parent Education

Some classes online. Access information will be provided after registration.

Register at saintpetershcs.com/ParentEd. For more information, call 732.745.8579.

Baby Care

Birth Center Class
(for moms under midwifery care)

Breastfeeding Class

Childbirth Education
(in Spanish)

Grandparents Class

Hypnobirthing™

New Daddy Class

Prenatal Breastfeeding
(in Spanish)

Prenatal Yoga/Exercise Class

Prepared Childbirth/Lamaze Classes
Sibling Class

Parent Support

Registration is required. Visit saintpetershcs.com/ParentEd or call 732.745.8579.

New Moms Support Group "Life Will Never Be The Same"

1st Tuesday of each month
Next meeting: April 7 • 12 pm

Breastfeeding Support Group

1st Tuesday of each month
Next meeting: April 7 • 1 pm

Support Groups

Bariatric Nutrition Support

2nd Thursday of each month
Next meeting: April 9 • 6 – 7 pm
Call 732.339.7450 for Zoom meeting information

Bereavement

Call Pastoral Care for information: 732.745.8565

MyGoal Autism Family

2nd Sunday of each month
Next meeting: April 12 • 3 pm
Call 877.886.9462 or email info@mygoalautism.org for virtual meeting information

SHARE

3rd Thursday of each month
Next meeting: April 16 • 7 – 9 pm
Call 732.745.8522 or email imariano@saintpetersuh.com for Zoom link

Spouse/Partner Caregiver Support

Call for information: 732.745.8600, x8653

New Group!

Stroke Survivors

First Wednesday of each month
Next meeting: April 1 • 10 am
To register, call 732.565.5455 or email cknospe@saintpetersuh.com



BREAST CANCER

SCREENING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY



Women 40 to 44

Option to start annual mammogram

Women 45 to 54

Annual mammogram recommended

Women 55+

Maintain annual mammogram or switch to a mammogram every other year

Schedule a mammogram at Saint Peter's

Women's Imaging Center by calling 732.339.7704



Lung Cancer Screening

You may be eligible for lung cancer screening through a low-dose radiation CT scan if you meet all of the following criteria:

• Age: 50 to 80 years old (50 to 77 for Medicare patients)

• **Smoking Status:** Currently smoke or have quit within the past 15 years

• **Smoking History:** At least 20 pack-years (equivalent to smoking 1 pack a day for 20 years, 2 packs a day for 10 years, and so on)

For more information or to see if you qualify, call 732.745.8600, ext. LUNG (5864).



SAVE THE DATE

2026 FUNDRAISING EVENTS

Teeing Off for Kids: The Dr. Bipin Patel Community Golf Outing

MONDAY, JUNE 8, 2026
METUCHEN GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB

President's Golf Classic

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2026
THE RIDGE AT BACK BROOK

saintpetershcs.com/foundation

Need a doctor? To find a Saint Peter's physician, visit saintpetershcs.com/findaphysician.

Online scheduling is also available with select Saint Peter's Healthcare System physicians via Zocdoc at BookMySPDoc.com

This calendar is for information only. Do not rely on it to make healthcare decisions on your own; instead, talk with your healthcare provider for advice and treatment. Do not ignore medical advice or delay seeking it because of something you read here. We do not suggest or endorse that you have any tests, use products, or use other information in this document without advice from your healthcare provider.



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