This leaflet has been designed to explain alveolar bone grafts and it contains answers to many frequently asked questions. If you have any other questions that the leaflet does not answer, or if you would like further information, please ask us.

**What is an alveolar bone graft and why do I need one?**
Some children with cleft lip and palate have a gap (cleft) in the jaw bone (alveolus) where some of their upper front teeth should grow. This gap in the bone goes through to the lower part of the nose. An alveolar bone graft is designed to fill this gap in the bone because teeth will not come through into the mouth if there is no bone for them to travel through. At the moment, alveolar bone graft surgery is the only way of treating this problem.

**When will this operation be carried out?**
The operation to repair the alveolar cleft needs to be done before the permanent canine (eye) tooth is due to come through into the mouth. This means it is generally done between 8 and 11 years of age. Some children will need orthodontic treatment (braces) to straighten the teeth before and/or after the graft surgery. X-rays are taken to check the teeth as there can be extra teeth or missing teeth within the cleft.

**What does an alveolar bone graft operation involve?**
The operation is done under general anaesthetic (completely asleep). A small amount of bone will be taken from the front of the hip bone – this is not part of the hip joint. A small cut (3-4cm) will be made over the side of the hip bone to allow part of the bone to be removed. This cut will be stitched and the stitches will need to be removed later. The strength of the hip bone is not affected by the small amount of bone that is removed.

In the mouth, the gum over the cleft is lifted to uncover the gap. The part of the gap that goes through to the nose is repaired and any extra teeth are removed. The bone from the hip is then placed into the gap and the gum is closed with dissolvable stitches. The gum and the hip are both injected with long-lasting local anaesthetic so that they are numb for several hours after the operation.

**How long will I be in hospital?**
Children having an alveolar bone graft usually come into hospital on the morning of their operation. Most children are able to go home after two nights in hospital.
What are the risks?
Most patients find the operation site in the mouth heals very well and causes very few problems. The hip area can be sore for a few weeks after the operation. Very rarely, there can be numbness over the side of the leg where the bone graft was taken. If there is numbness it usually recovers by itself but this can take some time (weeks or months). Sometimes the bone graft can be partly lost in the weeks after surgery and a further operation may be required. This is very uncommon. Infection is a possibility after any operation but is also very uncommon. The risk of infection can be reduced by keeping the mouth clean and protecting the hip after the operation.

What can I expect after the operation?
We like you to stay in bed for the first night in hospital as you may be unsteady on your feet. The day after the operation we like you to start walking.

You will be encouraged to drink as soon as possible after the operation. You will also be able to eat very soon after the operation. You will get soft or liquidised food at first and an antiseptic mouthwash to rinse your mouth out after eating. You should avoid sticky foods.

You will get regular painkillers while you are in hospital and you should continue these at home until your pain reduces and you are comfortable.

The stitches in your hip will usually need to be removed 7-10 days after the surgery. Before you leave the hospital we will give you an appointment to come back to the clinic for this. We will also check your mouth at this appointment.

Most patients will need to take 1-2 weeks off school but this does vary from one person to another. You can gradually start exercising and sports about 4-6 weeks after surgery.

This leaflet is available online at http://www.ucc.ie/en/dentalschool/patients