Baby undergoes surgery for rare birth defect

By Nicole Johnson

CHARLESTON, SC (WCSC) - A newborn baby is the first person to undergo a surgery to repair a rare birth defect at MUSC. Lee Burton was born with a hole in his diaphragm, which could possibly have deadly consequences.

Baby Lee is in the nursery recovering with mom and dad close by. He just underwent emergency surgery a few days ago for a rare birth defect.

"He came out crying. We didn't expect that. When I heard him crying I knew that he was going to be fine," Jason Burton said.

The one-week old boy was born with a hole in his diaphragm, the muscle that is crucial for breathing and keeping other organs from rising into the chest, crushing the lungs.

"It was really scary. You go the entire pregnancy thinking everything's great and then you find out," Jennifer Burton said.

Baby Lee underwent a minimally invasive diaphragmatic hernia repair, at MUSC's Children's Hospital. Doctors say what makes the surgery so different is that they only had to make a five millimeter incision for all the repairs.

"That allows us to put a camera and very tiny instruments and repair the hernia through the chest through very small incisions," Dr. Chris Streck said.

The Burtons live in Charleston, and they found out about their first-born's damaged diaphragm 35 weeks into the pregnancy.

"As a mother you go online and research everything. There's a lot of really scary stuff out there. We're so lucky that we live in the city with one of the greatest pediatric hospitals in the world," Jennifer Burton said.

Doctors have performed surgery to repair a damaged diaphragm in the past, but the benefits of doing it with such small incisions are a shorter recovery time, less scarring, and less time on a ventilator. Baby Lee is currently breathing on his own.

A hole in the diaphragm is a rare birth defect. More than half of the babies who undergo this type of surgery don't survive.

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