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Preventable disease leaves 13 year old with mechanical heart valve

[RHD Australia](#) will mark World Heart Day on 29 September by reminding people that rheumatic heart disease is preventable.

Diagnosed at the age of seven, Carlisa Willika from the Werenbun community north of Katherine in the Northern Territory has lived with rheumatic heart disease for the past five years.

Carlisa has had four major heart operations to repair and replace severe damage to her heart, and now has a mechanical heart valve.

The impacts of the disease mean Carlisa can't play contact sports, has to be careful when she cuts herself due to blood thinning medication, and has to have penicillin injections every 28 days for the rest of her life.

Rheumatic heart disease is the most common childhood heart disease in the world, and is prevalent among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

RHD Australia Deputy Director, Claire Boardman said, "If rheumatic heart disease is detected early and people have monthly penicillin injections to prevent further episodes, they can live a normal life."

Rheumatic heart disease often reveals itself in pregnancy and there is no evidence-based consensus on best practice management.

A two-year study by the [Australasian Maternity Outcomes Surveillance System](#) commenced this year to record the real prevalence of rheumatic heart disease in pregnancy in Australia and New Zealand.

The study, the largest population based study of its kind and conducted globally, will provide an evidence base to improve clinical care and outcomes for pregnant women and their babies.

To coincide with World Heart Day the World Heart Federation will launch a special issue of its journal [Global Heart](#) dedicated to rheumatic heart disease.

The issue covers a wide range of topics such as raising awareness that untreated sore throat caused by Group A Streptococcus can lead to acute rheumatic fever, which causes painful swelling of the joints, rashes, fever, and eventually the permanent heart valve damage associated with rheumatic heart disease.

For more information visit the RHD Australia website www.rhdaustralia.org.au



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Background information:

RHD Australia is Australia's national rheumatic heart disease coordination unit and aims to reduce death and disability from acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease. Funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing RHD Australia is an initiative of Menzies School of Health Research. The unit was established in 2009 as part of the National Rheumatic Fever Strategy.