Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate

Clefts of the lip (CL) and palate (CP) are facial malformations that occur during embryonic development and are the most common congenital deformities in the United States. They may appear separately or, more often, together.

The palate can be divided into the primary and secondary palates. The primary palate consists of the medial portion of the upper lip and the portion of the alveolar ridge that contains the central and lateral incisors. The secondary palate consists of the remaining portion of the hard palate and all of the soft palate. CL may vary from a small notch in the upper lip to a complete cleft extending into the base of the nose, including the lip and the alveolar ridge (Fig. 22-4). CL can be unilateral or bilateral. Deformed dental structures are associated with CL. Isolated CP occurs in the midline of the secondary palate and may also vary from a bifid uvula (the mildest form of CP) to a complete cleft extending from the soft palate to the hard palate.