



Twin girls' separation but a thumb-width away

By **JULIA MEDEW**
 HEALTH REPORTER

SURGEONS have performed the last operation in a series of delicate procedures to prepare conjoined twins Krishna and Trishna for their final separation next year.

Plastic surgeons from the Royal Children's Hospital inserted five silicone bags into the toddlers' conjoined head last month to slowly expand their skin and create new tissue for their individual heads.

The orphaned Bangladeshi girls, who will turn two this month, are joined at the back of the skull, meaning they are unable to sit up and have never seen each other.

A series of five major operations has almost completely separated their brains this year, which remain connected in an area the size of an adult thumb.

A major vein that had joined the pair has been separated, and now minor blood vessels — the width of the lead in a pencil —

connect them.

Plastic surgeon Andrew Greensmith said up to three litres of saline solution would be gradually inserted into the bags in coming months, so there is enough skin to wrap around their heads during the final operation to separate them.

"We're creating genuine new tissue, which we will need at the time of the final operation to cover all their vital organs, including their brains when they are exposed," he said.

"We should be able to build up a huge volume of skin, probably as much as the size of a basketball."

Mr Greensmith said another two bags had been inserted into the twins' thighs as "backup" in case they needed more tissue for the final surgery, which should take place in the first three months of next year.

He said the team of specialists was deliberately taking the

separation very slowly to increase the chance of success.

"It will be the longest separation of conjoined twins at the head ever done . . . We don't want it to be an act of surgical bravado, where we've separated them and they've survived. We want two normal children who have survived and are not impaired," he said.

"There have been a small number who have been separated and survived, but there is really only one or two that can be truly regarded as normal."

Moira Kelly, their guardian from the Children First Foundation who brought them to Melbourne for surgery last year, said they had recovered well from their last procedure. She said Krishna had also had a tracheostomy removed this week, allowing her to speak.

