



**NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S**  
*When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.™*

## **Helping Hand™**

*Health Education for Patients and Families*

# **General Anesthesia for Dentistry**

General anesthesia (an ess THEE sha) is a way of giving medicine so a person is “asleep.” Usually, a gas is breathed in through a mask. Sometimes it is given by an IV (intravenous) route.

Anesthesiologists use this way of giving medicine so patients do not remember what happened during the surgery. Sometimes we suggest that children have general anesthesia to have dental treatment done.

## **When general anesthesia is needed**

We follow national guidelines for choosing the children who should be treated under general anesthesia. The reasons may include any of the following:

- Your child is too young to understand or cooperate for dental care (usually age 4 or less).
- Your child has special healthcare needs or other major medical problems.
- A large number of cavities in the teeth makes it hard for the child to handle treatment while awake.
- Your child is so fearful of dental treatment that sedation medicine is not enough to help him or her get over the fears.

## **Insurance coverage**

Many insurance plans, **but not all of them**, cover general anesthesia for dentistry. It is important to talk about the financial details **before** a surgery date.

## **Dental surgery - the week before**

The nurse who works with the anesthesia doctor will call you 1 to 3 days before surgery to tell you the exact time to come to the hospital. At that time, it is **very important to tell the nurse if your child is taking any medicines or has been sick recently**.

Please keep the whole day open on the appointment date. Arrange for someone to care for other children in the family while you are at the hospital. Ask another responsible adult to come with you to help care for your child on the drive home after dental surgery. You will need to make sure that you (or another responsible adult) are available to take care of your child at home for the rest of the day after the dental surgery.

## **Dental surgery - the day of**

**It is VERY IMPORTANT that your child does not eat or drink anything after midnight the day before the appointment. Your child should not take any medicine unless the doctor says it is okay.**

- Your child should not wear contact lenses, cosmetics, jewelry, synthetic fingernails or fingernail polish. He or she should wear loose-fitting clothes with short sleeves. Please bring a complete change of clothes for your child.
- When it is time to get ready for the general anesthesia, you and your child will be taken to a consultation room. The anesthesia doctor and dentist will talk with you. Then your child will be taken into the Operating Room, where he or she will sit on a bed. This is where the anesthesia medicine will be given, usually through a face mask. In certain cases, one parent may stay with the child until he or she is asleep. It takes about 10 to 45 seconds for a child to fall asleep.
- After your child is asleep, you may wait in the reception area or assigned room. **A PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN MUST BE PRESENT FOR THE START OF ANESTHESIA AND STAY AT THE HOSPITAL DURING THE WHOLE SURGERY.**
- Before the surgery, after your child is asleep, he or she will be lying on a bed, body covered by a sheet. An IV will be started so we can give other medicines that help the anesthesia work. Various vital signs will be monitored. A breathing tube will be put in, usually through the nose, so the doctor can carefully control your child's breathing.
- When the surgery is finished, your child will go to the recovery room. A nurse will come and get you when the child wakes up. The doctors or nurses will let you know when you can take your child home.
- Common complaints after dental surgery include sore nose and throat, agitation (acting restless) when waking up, and bruising at the IV site.

## **Risks of general anesthesia**

There are some risks with general anesthesia, especially when the child is not otherwise healthy. Rare complications can include temporary or permanent brain damage and even death. However, general anesthesia is very safe when used for a healthy child. The anesthesiologist will discuss the risks and answer your questions before giving general anesthesia.