

## Post-anesthesia care unit (PACU)

### What is the post-anesthesia care unit?

The post-anesthesia care unit (also called PACU or “recovery room”) is the specialized patient care unit near the operating rooms. Patients who have had surgery are cared for in the PACU as they begin to wake up from anesthesia.

### How is my child cared for in the PACU?

The anesthesia team will bring your child to the PACU after surgery, shortly after you have talked with the surgeon. While waking up from anesthesia, children have special medical needs. It is not the same as waking up from regular sleep. Nurses are specially trained for this type of care. The anesthesiologist is available to help meet your child's medical needs.

One nurse stays by your child at all times during the wake-up process to ensure safety, make sure your child is breathing well, and watch the vital signs (pulse, blood pressure, and oxygen level in the blood). Monitors are used to help staff watch your child closely. Oxygen is given until your child is breathing well.

Pain medicine is given as needed. After receiving pain medicine, children need to be observed for a time due to the sleepiness and possible changes in breathing caused by most pain medications.

If your child takes a comfort item along to surgery—such as a toy or special blanket—it will be with him or her in PACU.

If you need to go somewhere while your child is in surgery or PACU, please tell a staff member or volunteer where you will be. If no staff is present, always leave one family member in the family waiting area to receive information. If the phone rings, please answer it. **Important: Do not leave the building during this time.**

### When can I be with my child?

Each child has unique needs when waking from anesthesia. Some children wake quickly and are reunited with their parents in the hallway outside of PACU. Some children need longer observation in PACU. To help support your child's recovery from anesthesia, one parent may be asked to be with the child until ready to leave the PACU.

Before you enter the PACU, staff will first be sure that:

- no child's safety or privacy will be affected.
- your child is breathing well and has regained the ability to cough.

Before you enter the PACU, you must first be sure that:

- you feel comfortable in a medical setting—please don't feel that you have to go into the PACU if you are not comfortable with it.
- you can provide a calm supportive presence for your child.
- you are willing to follow all directions from staff, even if we cannot explain fully at the moment. We will explain as soon as we can.

## What guidelines should I follow in the PACU?

- Do not enter PACU unless escorted by a staff member.
- No food or beverages are allowed at the child's bedside.
- **Turn off the power to your cell phone—they interfere with medical equipment.**
- Pagers must be set on silent.
- Respect the privacy of other children and their families in PACU by not asking about them.
- For a child's safety, yours, or someone else's, you may be asked to leave PACU and return to the family waiting area.

## How can I help my child?

Every child responds differently during the wake-up period. After surgery, children are sensitive and can be easily upset. To help them get through this time, we encourage them to sleep until they awaken on their own. Although the nurse will give you guidance, here are some tips for helping your child relax after anesthesia:

- Do not disturb your child if sleeping.
- Approach your child with a calm manner and quiet voice.
- Use a firm, steady touch. Try not to lightly rub or stroke your child.

## How long will my child be in the PACU?

Because each child and each surgery are different, the length of time spent in PACU varies from a few minutes to more than two hours. Do not be alarmed if your child is in PACU longer than you had expected. If you have questions or concerns, please ask a staff member.

Children leave PACU when:

- they respond to their surroundings.
- they are medically stable.
- we have treated the pain to the best of our ability.

## Questions?

This sheet is not specific to your child, but provides general information. If you have any questions, please ask your child's nurse or doctor.

For more information please see the education sheet, "Anesthesia: Questions and answers".

For more reading material about this and other health topics, please call or visit the Family Resource Center library, or visit our Web site: [www.childrensmn.org](http://www.childrensmn.org).

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