

Common events and risks for children and young people having a general anaesthetic

This summary card shows some of the common events and risks that healthy children and young people of normal weight face when having a general anaesthetic (GA) for routine surgery (specialist operations may carry different risks).

Modern anaesthetics are very safe. There are some common side effects which are usually not serious or long lasting. Risk will vary between individuals, and will depend on the procedure and the anaesthetic technique used. Your anaesthetist will discuss with you the risks they believe to be most significant. You should also discuss with them anything you feel is important to you.

Very common

More than 1 in 10
Equivalent to one person in your family



Sore throat



Agitation on waking from GA

Mainly ages 1-6 years



Sickness



Temporary changes in behaviour

eg, anxiety, sleep problems, bedwetting

Common

Between 1 in 10 and 1 in 100
Equivalent to one person in a street



Minor lip or tongue injury



Discomfort at injection site

More information

Our website has more on these risks as well as short videos to help children prepare for surgery.



Scan to find out more:



rcoa.ac.uk/childrensinfo

Uncommon

Between 1 in 100 and 1 in 1,000
Equivalent to one person in a village



Breathing problems

Needing treatment



Skin damage

Mainly longer procedures

Rare

Between 1 in 1,000 and 1 in 10,000
Equivalent to one person in a small town



Need for Intensive Care (unplanned)

1 in 2,400

Risk is higher for children under 1 year



Injury to eye

eg, scratch on eye



Damage to teeth

Very Rare

1 in 10,000 to 1 in 100,000 or more
Equivalent to one person in a large town



Anaphylaxis

1 in 40,000

Severe allergic reaction to a drug



Awareness during an anaesthetic

1 in 60,000



Death as a direct result of anaesthesia

1 in 100,000 to 1 in a million



Long-term disability

Less than 1 in 100,000

Things we all do in normal life, such as road travel, involve higher risks than the **Very Rare** risks above.



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