

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**



**Breathing
problems**

Needing treatment



Skin damage

Mainly longer
procedures

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](https://rcoa.ac.uk/childrensinfo)

Uncommon

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



**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**

Rare

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



Anaphylaxis

1 in 40,000

Severe allergic reaction
to a drug



**Awareness during
an anaesthetic**

1 in 60,000



**Long-term
disability**

Less than
1 in 100,000



**Death as a direct
result of anaesthesia**

1 in 100,000 to
1 in a million

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



Leave your feedback on this resource at: rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo/risks-child#tell-us or by scanning the QR code.