

CT Scan



This is what a CT (computed tomography) scanner looks like.

What is a CT scan?

A CT (computed tomography) scan, sometimes called a “CAT scan,” is an X-ray done using special equipment and computers. The machine takes a series of detailed X-ray pictures, which provide a multidimensional look at a body part.

Checking in for your appointment

Arrive 15 minutes before your scheduled appointment. Being late can affect other appointments and can delay your appointment.

Check in at the level 6 Radiology reception desk located near the Ocean entrance.

Upon arrival, females 12 years and older will be asked to provide a urine sample for pregnancy screening for certain CT scans.

If you will be late or have questions about testing, please call Radiology at 206-987-2089.

How long will the scan take?

Most CT scans take 10 minutes or less. However, if your child is scheduled with anesthesia, your visit can take up to 2 to 3 hours.

To Learn More

- Radiology
206-987-2089
- Ask your child’s healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

How is the CT scan done?

Your child will lie on a long, narrow table. The X-rays are taken as the table moves slowly through the middle of a large donut-shaped piece of equipment.

Some CT scans require a special X-ray contrast material be given first. The contrast is given through an IV tube placed in a vein. Children who are having a CT scan of the stomach area (abdomen) may also be asked to drink an oral contrast (a dye). In these cases, you will need to arrive 2 hours before the exam time.

How do I prepare my child?

Children who are not given anesthesia must try to lie very still during the scan. The actual scan is not painful, although there may be some brief discomfort if your child needs contrast through an IV. If contrast is needed, we will instruct you not to give your child anything to eat or drink 4 hours before the scan.

Due to confidentiality issues, it is not possible for parents to observe the scan from the control area. You will be able to see your child during the scan from an outside window.

If your child becomes ill before the scan or is sick on the day of the scan, please call the scheduling coordinator. The scan may need to be rescheduled.

Will my child have anesthesia?

It depends on the age of the child, the type of scan being performed and your child's ability to hold still during the scan. The scheduling coordinator will discuss this option with you at the time of scheduling. If your child is getting general anesthesia and will be asleep for the scan, you will need to allow 2 to 4 hours for the appointment. This includes the pre-anesthesia nurse visit and recovery time after the test.

If having anesthesia, your child can eat or drink:

- Solids, milk and formula up to 6 hours before your scheduled appointment
- Breast milk up to 4 hours before the appointment
- Clear liquids like apple juice (without pulp), 7-Up or water up to 2 hours before the appointment
- **Nothing** more to eat or drink 2 hours before the appointment. This includes items like gum and mints.

Does CT use radiation?

Yes, CT uses X-rays; therefore, a small amount of radiation is given to the patient.

At Seattle Children's, we are experts in the special needs of your growing child. We understand that radiation dose is a special concern for children. Therefore, we use the lowest amount of radiation needed to perform your child's exam. We also carefully screen radiology requests for appropriateness and alternative methods of imaging. For more information, see our "Radiation Exposure" handout (seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE1128.pdf).

If you have questions regarding the need for your child's CT exam, please contact the ordering physician to help answer your concerns.

When will the results be available?

The images from your child's radiology procedure are typically reviewed by a radiologist within 24 hours and a report will be sent to the doctor who ordered the test. If you have a clinic or doctor appointment scheduled, the doctor will review the results with you then. If you do not have a visit scheduled, you should call your child's doctor for the results.

To Learn More

- Radiology
206-987-2089
- Neurology Clinic
206-987-2079
- Cancer and Blood Disorders Center
206-987-2106
- Neurodevelopmental Clinic
206-987-2210
- Neurosurgery Clinic and Office
206-987-2508