

Bone Scan

What is a bone scan?

A bone scan is a test to look at your child's entire skeleton. It is used to diagnose causes of bone pain due to trauma, disease or other reasons. This exam requires an injection of a tracer (radiopharmaceutical) into a vein in your child's arm, hand or foot.

How do I prepare my child?

Dress your child in comfortable clothes without zippers or snaps. Sweats are a good choice.

We have movies your child can watch or they can bring their favorite DVD from home to watch during the scan.

If your child needs anesthesia (medicines to help them fall asleep during the test) you will receive more instructions from the nurse practitioner the day before the scan.

How do we check in for the appointment?

Arrive 20 minutes before your scheduled appointment. Being late can affect other appointments and can delay your appointment. If you will be late, please call Radiology at 206-987-2089.

Check in at the level 6 registration desk inside the Ocean entrance. After you complete registration, you will be directed to the Radiology reception area.

What happens during the bone scan?

A technologist or nurse will place an IV (small needle in the vein) in your child for the tracer injection. For some children, the technologist or nurse may inject the tracer without placing an IV. Either way, your child will only feel a little discomfort, like a mild pinch.

Depending on the area of your child's body that will be scanned and the reason for the scan, some images may be taken right after the tracer injection. These images take about 15 minutes, and your child must lie still on the scan table. Following these images, your child can leave the department, but they will need to come back in about 3 hours. If images are not needed right after the injection, your child may leave and return 3 hours later for the delayed scan.

It is important to keep your child hydrated during the break. Your child can drink water or juice and have something to eat. But, if your child is scheduled for other tests that require them to not eat or drink, please continue to follow those instructions.

The set of delayed images will begin about 3 hours after the tracer is given. Your child will have to lie still on the exam table for about 1 hour. The nuclear medicine doctor may want more images after viewing the first images.

1 of 2

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.



A bone SPECT (single photon emission computed tomography) is sometimes needed as well as the bone scan. SPECT provides a 3-D image to the doctors. This special type of picture takes an additional 30 minutes.

Anesthesia can be used for patients 5 years and under, and for those unable to hold still. You may be given different instructions to follow during the break time if your child is being given anesthesia.

You can stay with your child in the exam room unless your child is under anesthesia. Please make other arrangements for siblings.

Does the bone scan use radiation?

Yes, your child will be exposed to a small amount of radiation. We understand that radiation dose is a special concern for children. To lower how much radiation your child is exposed to, we customize the bone scan based on your child's age, weight and area to be examined.

If you have questions about the exam and whether it is needed, please contact the doctor who ordered the scan for your child.

What happens after the test?

There are no special instructions for your child to follow after the bone scan.

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.