

Lung Scan



What is a lung scan?

A lung scan is a test most often used to find a blood clot that is blocking normal blood flow to part of a lung (pulmonary embolism). Other common reasons for a lung scan are evaluating hypoplastic lung disease and CDH (congenital diaphragmatic hernia). Lung scans are also done to see how well the lungs are working.

Sometimes, we want to see how your child's lungs are working before your child has surgery.

Two types of lung scans are usually done:

- **Ventilation scan** — During a ventilation scan, your child will breathe in a radioactive tracer mist so it goes into their lungs. Pictures from this scan can show areas of the lungs that are not receiving enough air.
- **Perfusion scan** — During a perfusion scan, we will inject a small amount of radioactive tracer into a vein (IV) in your child's arm. It travels through the bloodstream and into the lungs. Areas of your child's lungs that are not getting enough blood show up as "cold" spots on the scan images.

If your child's lungs are working normally, blood flow on a perfusion scan matches air flow on a ventilation scan. A mismatch between the two scans may be a sign of a blood clot or other problem. We will study the images more to measure how well each lung is working on its own.

1 of 3

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.

Ventilation and perfusion scans can be done separately or together to find certain lung diseases. If both scans are done, the test is called a V/Q scan. In this case, the ventilation scan is usually done first.

How do I prepare my child for the scan?

Your child can eat and drink like normal before the lung scan.

Dress your child comfortably in clothes without zippers or metal snaps. Sweat pants and shirt are a good choice.

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

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 scan?

A nuclear medicine technologist will do your child's lung scan. A radiologist will review the images from the scan. We do not usually use anesthesia for this scan.

During the scan, your child will lie on their back with the scanning camera above their chest.

Ventilation scan

For the ventilation scan, we will place a mask over your child's mouth and nose. They will breathe in the tracer (in the form of a mist) through the mask by taking deep breaths for 2 to 3 minutes. Once the mask is removed, we will begin taking pictures. Each image will take several minutes. We will move the camera around your child to take pictures of different angles of their lungs.

This scan takes about 20 minutes.

Perfusion scan

For the perfusion scan, the technologist cleans the site on your child's arm where the radioactive tracer will be injected. Then they inject a small amount of the tracer.

After the tracer is injected, the same series of pictures will be taken again. Your child will need to remain very still during the scans to avoid blurring the images.

This scan takes about 20 minutes.

How does the scan feel?

Most children do not have any problem with the mask. However, your child may find that breathing through the mask during the ventilation scan is awkward, especially if your child is very short of breath. There will be plenty of oxygen coming through the mask the entire 2 to 3 minutes that the mask is on your child's face.

Your child may feel nothing at all from the needle puncture when the tracer is injected, or they may feel a brief sting or pinch as the needle goes through the skin. Otherwise, a lung scan is usually painless.

Does the lung 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 minimize how much radiation your child is exposed to, we customize the lung scan based on your child's age and weight and the 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.

Are there any risks with a lung scan?

Allergic reactions to the radioactive tracer are rare. Most of the tracer will leave your child's body (through pee or poop) within a day. The amount of radiation is so small that it is not a risk for people to come in contact with your child following the scan.

How do we get the lung scan results?

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.