If your young child needs surgery, you may have concerns about many things including the anesthesia your child will receive. Here are answers to some of the common questions parents have about anesthesia safety. You should also discuss these questions with your child’s physician anesthesiologist to help you feel more comfortable.
Q. What anesthesia options are available for my child?
A. A physician anesthesiologist will meet with you and review the appropriate anesthetic to keep your child comfortable and pain free during the procedure. There are many types of anesthesia, including sedation, general and regional, and sometimes your child may have more than one type of anesthesia depending upon the procedure. The medication will be given either through an IV or a mask that lets your child inhale the medication. For some procedures, local anesthesia, which numbs a small area, may be an option.

Q. Is anesthesia safe? Has there been research regarding the safety of anesthesia for kids?
A. Research shows that anesthesia is safer than it's ever been, particularly when provided during one short surgery of less than three hours. Most common surgeries in children require anesthesia for less than two hours. Physician anesthesiologists are leading ongoing research on anesthesia in children (and adults) including its effect on the developing brain and continue to study this important issue. Parents should be confident that physicians are aware of anesthesia concerns in longer procedures and will only recommend a surgery or procedure if the benefits outweigh any potential risks.

Q. Could the surgery wait to be done when my child is older?
A. Ask your child’s surgeon about the importance of having surgery right away. Surgery usually is not recommended unless the physician thinks it is needed in a timely manner. Consider that there often is a risk to delaying or avoiding surgery, which means your child will not receive much-needed care. For example, if your child has repeated ear infections, a physician may recommend surgical placement of ear tubes to prevent further infections. Not doing surgery increases the risk of delayed speech and hearing development, as well as the development of antibiotic-resistant infections.

Q. How will my child be monitored during the procedure?
A. Your child will be closely monitored throughout the entire surgery for the safest and most effective care. That includes ensuring your child stays warm, gets enough oxygen, has stable blood pressure and receives necessary fluids. If needed, adjustments to the anesthetics will be made to help keep your child safe and comfortable.

Q. What can be done to safely manage my child’s pain after surgery?
A. Your child’s pain will continue to be controlled. Your physician anesthesiologist will determine the best pain control method to ensure your child recovers as comfortably as possible. That may include medication taken by mouth, given through an IV or an injection of local anesthetics around nerves.

Q. How can I explain what is going to happen and what the anesthesia does to my child?
A. Reassure your child that the surgery is important to help correct a problem or make him or her feel better. Explain that the doctor will provide medicine so the surgery doesn’t hurt. In fact, your child won’t even remember the surgery. Nurses and doctors will be there to care for your child every step of the way, and you will be waiting close by to see your child when the surgery is completed.