FAQ’s for Parents

What is an x-ray?
X-rays are invisible bundles of energy that pass through the body to create a picture of your child's bones and organs. For some areas being x-rayed, lead shields may be used to protect other parts of your child's body.

What is radiation?
Radiation is wave-like energy similar to a wave in the ocean. You may be more familiar with other waves carrying energy like light, heat, microwaves, and radio waves. Radiation can be used for many things but doctors use this type to see inside our bodies.

How much radiation is used for an x-ray?
The amount of radiation used during an x-ray is small. For a single chest x-ray, the test uses a radiation level similar to a 3 hour airline flight or 1 (one) day of background radiation that we receive every day from the world around us. The radiation does not stay in your child’s body after an x-ray.

Where do the x-rays come from?
An x-ray machine is like a camera but instead of light it uses x-rays to make the picture. The machine makes the x-rays in a tube only when taking your child’s pictures. They are then directed toward the child’s injured body part or organ.

What does an x-ray show?
The x-rays show the condition of bones and organs within the body. Doctors review them to see if your child is sick and decides on a plan to help your child. For example, when there are broken bones, an x-ray is the fastest and easiest way for doctors to see the injury.
What is the purpose of the x-rays?

The x-rays can be used to see inside any part of the body. Your child’s caregiver orders an x-ray for a specific reason such as is there pneumonia in a child with a cough and fever or is there a broken bone after a fall. The exam is specific for each person and is based on why the doctor needs to see more information.

How does the equipment work?

First, the x-ray beam must be centered over the area of concern. After the x-rays pass through the body part they reach an image plate or device that can be read by a computer.

How is the x-ray picture produced?

An x-ray picture is produced when small amounts of radiation pass through a body part to make a black and white image. Each part has its own shade of black and white. For example: bones look white on x-rays and air in the lungs looks black. The heart is somewhere in between and looks gray on the x-ray.

Can I stay in the room with my child?

You may be asked to stay with your child to keep him/her comfortable or in a specific position for the x-ray exam. It is recommended that you wear appropriate shielding, such as an apron, while in an x-ray room. Please inform the technologist if there is a chance you are pregnant.

Why do you take more than one x-ray?

The number of x-rays taken depends on the body part the doctor would like x-rayed and the reason for the x-rays. More than one x-ray is usually needed to show the part in different directions. Just like when you take a picture with a camera, you can see a person better with a front and side view. This is the same when a doctor views a body area to see if the area is healthy or needs medical care.
Why does the technologist switch the cassettes?

Not all x-ray equipment is exactly the same. Some equipment uses cassettes and each cassette is like a picture frame. It only can hold one picture at a time. Switching the cassette lets the technologist and doctors get all of the pictures they need.

What is the lead marker? What does it do?

The “L” or “R” on the picture marks your child’s left or right side. This helps the doctor to know which side is injured and if the body parts are in the correct place.

Why do you cover parts of my child?

The technologist uses a shield to help protect your child’s gonads (reproductive organs like the testes in boys and ovaries in girls) when it will not interfere with the x-ray needed. Even though the amount of radiation received is low, the technologist will protect your child as much as possible.

Will the x-rays hurt?

These exams are usually not painful, but require your child to keep still for a moment. Parents may be invited into the room while the x-rays are being taken to comfort and assist the child. If the child feels uncomfortable during the exam, let the technologist know. Patients do not feel the x-rays themselves.

Does my child need to close their eyes?

No, but they can if it makes them feel more comfortable. X-rays are similar to home photos. Good teamwork between “the technologist and the child” can help make the exam quick and simple.

Why do you need to keep my child from moving?

The doctors need the best possible pictures to make a decision. When your child moves during the x-ray it can blur some of the important structures in the body. At times, devices need to be used to keep your child still to help get the clearest picture. Rarely, an extra x-ray may need to be taken.
How long is it going to take?

The x-ray exam can be simple and quick. Once the x-rays are all taken they are sent to a computer for the x-ray doctor (radiologist) to see what is wrong. The radiologist then sends the results to the doctor that ordered them. Your doctor will go over the results with you.

Did the technologist see anything on the x-rays?

Technologists make sure all of the body parts needed for your doctor are shown on the x-rays. The technologist cannot give you the results. Only doctors can review the x-ray image. It is their job to see if the x-ray image looks normal or not.

Do I need to be concerned about the radiation from the test?

The amount of radiation used for x-rays is small. For example, the amount of radiation to get a picture of the lungs is small. This is because the lungs are filled with air and it is easy for the x-rays to pass through the lungs to make the x-ray picture. The Image Gently campaign suggests that x-rays be taken only when there is a benefit or help to your child. Also, the x-ray technologist should use the lowest amount of radiation possible to produce the needed x-rays for your doctor. As many experts are not certain what the x-rays can do to growing bodies, care should be taken whenever x-rays are taken to “child-size” the picture and only x-ray the part of the body needed.

What are the benefits of x-ray?

Parents are often concerned with the risks involved with getting x-rays but the benefits of x-rays most often outweigh any small risk. An x-ray may show where the problem is in a way that may be missed without the test. X-rays may help to show a wide variety of medical problems that can then be treated.

How long does it take to get my results?

Once the x-rays are looked at by the radiologist, the results are the sent to your doctor. This process has been sped up with new electronic systems. Your doctor should have the results in less than one day. Sometimes, the results are back within hours.

Can I have a copy of the x-ray?

Yes, you can. The technologist will tell you how the x-rays can be put on a CD disc for you.