



ASPAN

American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses

Clinical Practice: Frequently Asked Question

Q: Is there a minimum amount of time a pt is to be held in Ph 1 PACU before discharging to Ph 2?

- adults
- pediatric

A: Consensus of the American Society of Anesthesiologists Task Force on Postanesthetic Care is that a mandatory minimum stay is not necessary and that the length of stay should be determined on a case-by-case basis. ASPAN does not have a specific recommendation on the patient length of stay in the PACU.

There are several factors to consider when evaluating the patient's status for discharge from any phase of care. Some of these factors identified in the ASPAN practice Recommendation Components of Assessment and Management for the Perianesthesia Patient include, but are not limited to:

- airway and respiratory/ventilation status
- cardiac and hemodynamic status
- thermoregulation
- level of consciousness
- level of pain
- level of sedation
- condition of dressing/surgical site
- patient safety needs
- intake and output
- emotional status
- child-parent/family interactions
- postanesthesia scoring scale, if used
- discharge instructions reviewed
- arrangements for transition of care
- arrangements for safe transport

Guidelines for discharge criteria should be developed for each phase of PACU care. In determining guidelines for discharge, collaboration between the anesthesia department, the medical staff, the PACU staff, and administration is essential to establish clear expectations.

The resources listed below provide a good overview of the topic and may be used to start conversation at your facility.

References:

1. Abebe B, Kifle N, Gunta M, Tantu T, et al. Incidence and factors associated with post-anesthesia care unit complications in resource-limited settings: An observational study. Health Sci Rep. 2022 May 23;5(3):e649. doi: 10.1002/hsr2.649. PMID: 35620534; PMCID: PMC9125872.
2. American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses. 2023-2024 perianesthesia nursing standards, practice recommendations and interpretive statements. Cherry Hill, NJ; ASPAN.
3. Updated by the Committee on Standards and Practice Parameters, Jeffrey L. Apfelbaum, the Task Force on Postanesthetic Care, Jeffrey H. Silverstein, Frances F. Chung, Richard T. Connis, Ralph B. Fillmore, Sean E. Hunt, David G. Nickinovich, Mark S. Schreiner, The original Guidelines were developed by the American Society of Anesthesiologists Task Force on Postanesthetic Care, Jeffrey H. Silverstein, Jeffrey L. Apfelbaum, Jared C. Barlow, Frances F. Chung, Richard T. Connis, Ralph B. Fillmore, Sean E. Hunt, Thomas A. Joas, David G. Nickinovich, Mark S. Schreiner; Practice Guidelines for Postanesthetic Care: An Updated Report by the American Society of Anesthesiologists Task Force on Postanesthetic Care. Anesthesiology 2013; 118:291–307
doi: <https://doi.org/10.1097/ALN.0b013e31827773e9>.
4. Viellente, Team Leader: Eileen LatwisGonzalez, Team Members: Barbara et al. Nurse discharge by criteria decreases post anesthesia care unit (PACU) length of stay. Journal of PeriAnesthesia Nursing, Volume 36, Issue 4, e13.

This FAQ was reviewed and updated November 2024.