

Surgeons separate California conjoined twins

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Angelica Sabuco, 2, right, and her twin sister Angelina play together at the Lucile Packard Children's Hospital, Monday, Oct. 31, 2011 in Stanford, Calif. The Stanford hospital is preparing for surgical procedure to separate the two-year old girls, who were born joined at the chest and abdomen. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

(AP) -- Twin 2-year-old girls who were joined at the chest and abdomen were separated Tuesday during a lengthy, complex procedure at Stanford University's children's hospital.

The operation that gave sisters Angelina and Angelica Sabuco their independence took more than nine hours and a team of more than 40

people, including doctors, nurses and other personnel.

By mid-afternoon, the girls had moved to their own operating rooms at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital for the second phase of surgery - reconstructing the area where they were connected. Two hours later, they were moved to the [intensive care unit](#), each with a scar stretching from her chest to her belly.

"This is a dream come true," their mother, Ginady Sabuco, said through tears to reporters after the surgery was complete. "Words cannot express how the family feels."

Dr. Gary Hartman, the lead surgeon on the case, said the procedure went smoothly.

"The long term prognosis is that we should have a happy, healthy set of girls. We don't see any barrier to a full recovery," Hartman said.

Born in the Philippines, Angelina and Angelica moved to the United States with their mother last year. They live in San Jose with their parents and 10-year-old brother.

They had been doing very well considering the obstacles. The girls learned to walk despite their face-to-face orientation and could recite colors and numbers.

But Hartman said staying connected would have posed long-term [health risks](#), including increased damage to their skeletal and muscular structure.

The surgery required separating livers, diaphragms, breastbones, and chest and abdominal wall muscles.

The reconstruction included covering what [plastic surgeon](#) Dr. Peter Lorenz described as a "window" left in their chests after separation.

Since July, the [girls](#) had received weekly injections of sterile saltwater into balloons placed under their skin. The procedure stretched their skin and grew new skin to patch the area.

The children were being kept sedated and doctors said they could be awakened as early as Wednesday. They were expected to be in the hospital for at least two weeks.

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