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Dental X-Rays

One of the most common questions we get is about radiation safety and this sheet is meant to address some of these concerns. Please let us know if you have any additional questions.

Are X-rays necessary?

Dental X-rays are an essential part of diagnosing tooth decay, gum disease, infections, monitoring growth and development, treatment planning and screening for pathology that may have no other signs or symptoms. The recommended frequency of X-rays differs from patient to patient depending on age, dental history and risk level. X-Ray schedules can be found at www.aapd.org or www.ada.org.

Do you take X-rays every visit?

No, screening X-rays are typically every 6 - 18 months depending on age, oral hygiene and risk level. Problem-focused X-rays are only taken as often as needed, i.e. pain, abscess, missing teeth, eruption problems, etc. If you have any questions, please let the front desk know and we can discuss it before the appointment.

How much radiation is there?

Radiation is most commonly measured in either Sieverts (SV) or Rem (rem). The average American is exposed to 3-5 milli-Sieverts (mSv) of environmental radiation every year, while a standard dental X-ray is approximately 0.005mSv, or 1/1000 of annual exposure from the environment. Panoramic and cephalometric X-rays, which are taken at most every few years, are slightly higher. Digital sensors and collimation (proper shaping of the x-ray beam), like the equipment we use here in our office, reduces the exposure even further.

My child had two x-rays last month for a broken arm, can they still have their x-rays today?

Yes, while you should always report any medical radiation exposure to us when you come in for an appointment, it is quite rare that the maximum advisable annual exposure radiation is approached unless the patient is receiving radiation treatment for cancer. If your child is receiving radiation treatment, please inform us before it begins so proper dental precautions can be taken to avoid the potential for need for dental treatment while receiving/recovering from radiation.

Is it safe?

Cumulative lifetime exposure to radiation is an important factor in determining cancer risk and should not be taken lightly. However, the amount of exposure from dental x-rays is minuscule when compared to the average background radiation we all receive from the environment or even most other medical x-rays (see chart below). The benefits of diagnosis and appropriate treatment far outweigh the small exposure.

	Radiation Exposure (uSv)	Compared to Dental X-Ray
Dental X-Ray	< 5	1x
Flight from New York to Paris	30	6x
Chest X-Ray	100	20x
Mammogram	300	60x
Background Exposure (annual)	3000-5000	600-1000x
CT Scan	4000	800x

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