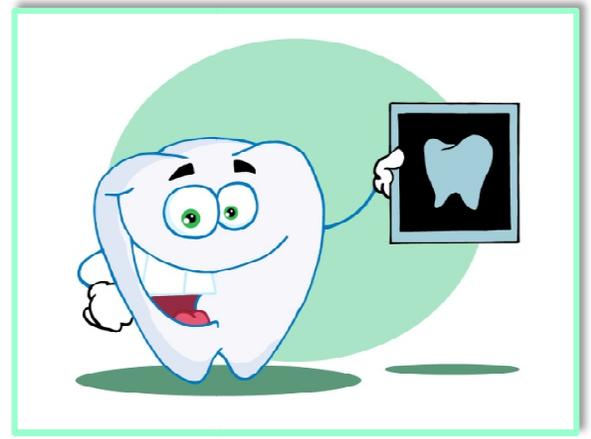


Dental Radiographs: A Valuable Diagnostic Tool



X-rays, also called radiographs, are a valuable diagnostic tool. X-rays help the dentist to:

- See how your child's teeth are erupting (coming into the mouth)
- See the number, size and position of teeth that are still inside the gums
- Find out whether there are extra teeth or missing teeth
- Monitor mouth and teeth injuries
- Determine whether the teeth or mouth are infected
- Prepare for braces and other orthodontic treatment
- Detect problems that can't be seen with a visual exam
- Identify bone disease

There is no standard timetable for when your child's mouth should be X-rayed. The need varies with the child's development and dental health. If your child has had many cavities and fillings or has a high risk of tooth decay, your dentist might suggest X-rays every six months. This may continue until the problem is under control. Whether X-rays are needed also depends on how well the child brushes and flosses, and the child's diet. **If X-rays aren't taken when they are needed, problems can become worse.**

There are various types of X-rays your dentist may use for your child, depending on the goal. These are three of the most common:

Bitewing X-rays



These X-rays are used to view the areas between teeth that cannot be seen directly. They show where cavities are starting. These X-rays are needed only after the teeth in the back of the mouth are contacting each other. In some children, this doesn't happen until the first permanent molar (also called the 6-year molar) has erupted.

Periapical X-rays (PA)



These are used to view the entire crowns and roots of one, two or three adjacent teeth. The X-rays also will show the supporting bone structure of the teeth. This type of X-ray lets the dentist see a child's permanent teeth growing below the baby teeth. It also is used to look for abscesses and gum disease.

Panoramic X-rays



These X-rays are used to view all of the teeth on one film. They also show the upper and lower jaws, the temporomandibular joints (TMJs) and the sinuses above the upper teeth. They are often used if a child has hurt his or her face, has orthodontic problems or is mentally or physically disabled. Panoramic X-rays, unlike other types, do not require a film to be put in the child's mouth. This is helpful for children who gag easily or who have small mouths. This X-ray has to be exposed for 12 to 18 seconds. The patient must be able to sit still for that whole time.

Safety:

Dental X-rays are very safe and expose your child to a minimal amount of radiation. When all standard safety precautions are taken, today's X-ray equipment is able to eliminate unnecessary radiation and allows the dentist to focus the X-ray beam on a specific part of the mouth. High-speed film enables the dentist to reduce the amount of radiation the patient receives. A lead body apron or shield should be used to protect the genital/reproductive area and the thyroid gland.

Digital Radiographs:

Digital radiographs are one of the newest X-ray techniques. Standard X-ray film is replaced with a flat electronic pad or sensor. The image goes into a computer, where it can be viewed on a screen, stored or printed out. Digital X-rays taken at different times can be compared using a process that highlights differences between the images. Tiny changes therefore can be caught earlier. Used properly, digital X-rays use about half the radiation of conventional film.

**** As always, if you have questions or concerns about how Radiograph X-rays can benefit your child's overall dental health, please see his/her dentist.**