



Transparency Is Key!

SUBMITTED BY DR. KATE GILSON, DDS

WAY TOO OFTEN WE HEAR STATEMENTS from patients like “Nothing is bothering me, so I want to skip x-rays this time,” or “my insurance doesn’t cover x-rays, so I don’t want them!” or “I don’t want the radiation!” As dental health providers, this can be very frustrating. Our goal is to always provide the absolute best care for our patients, and we simply cannot do our job to the fullest extent without the proper tools.

At dental check-ups, people are always hoping to get that good report telling them that they do not need to come back for any necessary dental work. Well, without the proper x-rays, we’re unable to see every area of your mouth. We’re only able to see the surfaces of your teeth that are visible above the gumline, which is only approximately 30% of the tooth. We cannot see the root surfaces or surrounding bone, nor can we see the areas where the teeth contact each other, to rule out cavities forming between the teeth. It’s impossible to tell you with absolute certainty that “everything looks good!” when we can’t even see everything!

There are two types of routine x-rays that your dentist or hygienist will recommend. One is a panoramic x-ray and the other is called a bitewing x-ray. They’re both very important and helpful in different

ways. The panoramic allows us to see all of the teeth in their entirety, along with all of the surrounding bone and sinus areas to check for any irregularities. The bitewing x-ray is an image that’s more focused on the coronal portion of the teeth, and allows us to check the areas between the teeth to ensure there are no cavities forming. Bitewings are recommended once per year, whereas panoramic images are typically taken every 3 to 5 years.

When it comes to radiation, the modern technology of digital dental x-rays has brought with it a significant decrease in the amount of radiation exposure while having dental x-rays taken. Digital x-rays are obtained using a sensor instead of film. For this reason, significantly less radiation is required to capture the images. According to the ADA, the amount of radiation you receive while having decay detecting x-rays (bitewings) is no more than the amount of radiation you are exposed to by watching television for one year!

Please keep these things in mind if you’re tempted to skip your yearly x-rays at your next dental appointment. It could cause you to have bigger, and more costly, problems down the road if you don’t allow your dentist the ability to see everything they need to see during your exam.

Dr. Kate Gilson

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