

It's the Most **Wonderful** Time of the Year— For a Dental Checkup >>



In late summer, parents help get their children ready for the first day of school by taking them back-to-school shopping for new clothes, shoes, and school supplies. Part of this back-to-school routine includes visits to the pediatrician or family physician for a complete annual physical exam and any required vaccinations. However, these exams, which include vision and hearing tests, overlook an important part of a child's health—oral health. Cavities are the most prevalent infectious disease among U.S. children, according to the American Dental Association (ADA), and it is estimated that 51 million school hours are lost each year due to dental-related causes.

That's why the Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) thinks it's important that parents schedule a dental exam as part of the back-to-school routine for all students.

Regular dental exams are important because they give dentists the chance to spot any current or future dental problems, such as cavities. As part of the exam, the dentist will examine the child's mouth, teeth, and gums, and may

take X-rays to see how the teeth are developing and if there is any decay not visible to the eye. The dentist may recommend preventive treatment, including fluoride treatments or dental sealants, which consist of a plastic material applied to the chewing surfaces of the back teeth. Dental sealants act as a barrier for protecting teeth from plaque, and they usually last several years before a reapplication may be necessary.

In early 2009, the MDS released its *Call to ACTION*, a five-year plan for improving the oral health of Massachusetts residents. One of the goals included in this public policy initiative is to require that all children have an oral exam performed by a dentist as part of their health requirements for entering school for the first time.

Every parent wants the best for his or her child, and that includes a happy and healthy smile. So as the sunny summer days wind down and you start making a checklist of what needs to be done to get your child ready for the school year, make sure to include a dental visit on that list. Don't have a regular dentist? Check out the "Find a Dentist" feature on the MDS Web site (www.massdental.org/findadentist), where you can search by city/town and languages spoken, among other criteria.



Did you know?



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