

# Preparing Your Kids for Their Next Dental Appointment

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In these unprecedented times, health checkups should not be overlooked.

Seeing your dentist for a cleaning and checkup can significantly improve your child's academic experience and performance by preventing potential problems that could become painful and distracting. Research shows that dental disease causes children to miss more than 51 million school hours each year.

## What to Expect

If your family hasn't been to the dentist since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, things may look different when you return.

Perhaps the most significant change is that you may be asked to wait in the waiting room or even in the car while your child goes to the treatment room, for social distancing purposes. While this may be a new experience for some children, it is also an opportunity for them to build confidence and exercise independence in a safe environment. As their dentist, I appreciate the opportunity to get to know my patients one-on-one, and the opportunity to give parents a small break!

Before an appointment in this environment, take the time to tell your kids what a trip to the dentist entails, explaining the new safety measures and protocols. For young children, try acting out the visit with a stuffed animal.

## Some changes to prepare for:

- A health screening will likely be conducted online or via phone prior to the appointment, and possibly again on-site.
- If your child spends time in another household, at daycare or in sports, make sure to self-screen and reschedule appointments if anyone in the family presents COVID-19 symptoms or has been around anyone with symptoms in the last 14 days.
- Expect fewer and staggered appointment times to allow ample time between patients for thorough disinfection and preparation of treatment rooms, and to limit the number of people in the office at a given time. Your dentist may ask that you only bring the child or children scheduled for an appointment.
- Hand sanitizing and temperature checks will be requested upon arrival, and wearing a mask in the office is required. If your child has never had his or her temperature taken with a touchless thermometer, act it out with them so they understand.
- Communal items such as toys and magazines may be removed from waiting rooms, so plan on bringing your own toy, book or entertainment while you wait.
- Talk to your child about how the dentist may look different and will be wearing additional protective gear. Dentists and hygienists will likely be

wearing scrubs and full body gowns, hair coverings, masks and face shields - tell them their dentist has always wanted to be an astronaut or scuba diver, and they are trying out the gear!

Most importantly, offer positive reinforcement and remind children that trips to the dentist are part of staying strong and healthy. Even prior to the pandemic, visiting the dentist could be a new and sometimes fearful experience for children. Encouraging and rewarding healthy oral habits is the best way to make the experience at the dentist's office more pleasant.



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