

Back to School Dental Check-Ups

According to a report by the United States Surgeon General, dental decay is the most prevalent childhood disease following the common cold. More than one half of all 5-9 year old children have at least one cavity or filling and more than 51 million hours of school are lost each year due to dental related illnesses. That's why it's important for parents to make a regular dental exam a part of their child's back to school routine unless twice a year check-ups are already part of their child's overall health program.

There is no question that having a clean, healthy smile can make your child feel good about how he or she looks. But most parents don't realize how serious dental disease is to the total health of their child. Tooth decay can affect the way a child eats, speaks, and pays attention in class. In fact, dental decay is five times more common than asthma and seven times more common than hay fever. The mouth is as important as the rest of the body.

Tooth decay is actually an infectious disease called caries. Cavities form when the bacteria in the mouth combine with sugars and starches in a child's foods and drinks. The bacteria then produce acids that wear through the enamel and cause cavities. Parents seem to know that cavities can't heal themselves and if anything, just get worse.

And it's not just a search for cavities that is performed at a back to school examination. The gums are also monitored for swelling or bleeding. Recent research has confirmed that there is a link between the bacteria associated with gum disease and other health concerns such as cardiovascular problems. And this routine screening also allows for early detection of changes in the color or texture of the tongue and other oral tissues.

Just like regular hand washing can help prevent disease, brushing and flossing can help prevent tooth decay and gum disease. And regular exams can help catch dental disease in its early stages. Parents can help their school children prevent dental health problems by making sure they brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, floss once a day, eat a well balanced diet, and get regular dental check-ups.

Make a dental check-up part of your child's back to school routine. It's easy, healthy, and less expensive than treating toothaches and dental emergencies. And that's a winning combination for you and your child.

Dr. Eric Lebowitz, a 20 year Pinecrest resident, is a pediatric dentist specializing in care for infants, children, and teens. He is in private practice at Tooth Fairy-Land, located in Kendall near Baptist Hospital. He may be contacted by calling (305) 279-4312 or by logging on to www.toothfairy-land.com.