

SUMMER APPOINTMENTS FOR STUDENTS

Dear Dr. McCrummen: Each summer I have a hard time getting a dental appointment, especially for my kids. The kids have lots of activities and I need to get them in before school starts. I often have to wait until Fall and take them out of school. What do you recommend? L.G.

Consider scheduling your summer appointments at least three months in advance for an appointment at the end of May, or in June. By pre-appointing at that visit you will be set for the next visit around Christmas break, then pre-appoint for six months later to be on the books for the following June. Your reservations will have been made and you will normally receive a reminder card and/or a call to confirm them. Be sure to provide the office with a full weeks' notice if you will not be able to keep those reservations, so someone else wanting to get their kids in can take their appointment times.

Another idea is to call and ask that your kids be put on a "short notice call list". If someone cannot keep their appointment you can be called to come in their place. Dental offices are very busy in the summer, with tourist emergencies, the return of our "snow birds", seeing patients visiting friends and relatives for sudden problems, and seeing people new to the area. The offices are often booked full and it may take over a month to be seen.

Many parents do not think about their kids appointments until August. If you can imagine, thousands of kids request to be seen for their visits that month. The parents are often disappointed, but the kids usually aren't.

Things to be aware of:

If you have dental insurance you may have to be seen at six month intervals or more for insurance coverage of examinations and cleanings. If you are seen even one day earlier than six months from your previous visit you may not receive any benefits at all. Be aware of your policy restrictions and read the fine print. Each person or family has a different type of policy. Your dental office will submit insurance claims but cannot be responsible for knowing the restrictions on each policy. Dental insurance is an agreement between you and your company, not the dental office. You are paying the insurance company to assist you in payment of dental treatment but they have no interest in paying for all of it.

When scheduling your kids please be sure that they show up for their pre-reserved appointment. Dental appointments can conveniently be forgotten when there is a choice of doing something fun with friends, or maybe just about anything else. The person that schedules the appointment, the parent, is responsible to be sure that their kids honor the reservation. Many offices must charge a "No Show", or "Late Cancel" fee for appointment failures. It is not a penalty or fine, but helps reduce the direct costs to prepare a room, set-up sterile instruments, re-sterilize them, and pay professional scale wages to the two to six employees to wait for an hour or more for the next scheduled patient. With at least 48 hours notice the office staff can contact some wanting to get their kids in to be seen.

If minors are being seen for the first time, or for complex treatment like extractions, the parents must be present. If the parents want to participate in the decision making process during treatment, and do not want to leave it up to the dentist to do what is necessary, they need to be present. If a parent cannot be present they may need to sign a release stating that they will trust the dentist to make all treatment decisions.