

Dear Dr. McCrummen, I was recently sick, and felt I needed to cancel my dental appointment. I called just before my afternoon visit and I could tell they were upset with me. I thought they would be happy that I didn't want to make them sick. Why would they be upset? If being sick is not a good reason what are good reasons to not keep an appointment? R.B.

They were probably unhappy because you did not give them enough notice to call someone else in for treatment in your place. Since you had an afternoon appointment a call could have been made early in the morning, or the day before if symptoms were felt. Whether a reservation is made for a hair appointment, massage, restaurant, lawyer, physician or dentist, a timely call is appreciated if cancellation is necessary.

About the only valid reason to cancel 'last minute' is if a true emergency arises. Other health reasons for cancellation could be as follows:

-If you have an active cold sore on your lip.

-Major sinus drainage or lung congestion.

-Active cold or flu symptoms.

-Uncontrolled coughing or sneezing.

-A very uncomfortable sore throat.

-A fever over 100 degrees.

-If you have returned from Asia, or other SARS area within the previous 10 days, or have any SARS symptoms. - Any health problem that would make it extremely difficult for you to be reclined and undergo treatment, or for the doctor or hygienist to provide their treatment.

A courtesy call to any dental office 24 to 72 hours prior to a reserved appointment time is appreciated and expected for changes in scheduling. 'Late notice cancellations' and "no shows" often top the list of the most frustrating situations a dental office deals with. When an operatory (dental room) is prepared, sterilized instruments are set out, one-use items are opened, and two or more professionally paid staff are there to provide their services. There are many direct business expenses involved. Some offices charge a fee to offset direct costs related to failure of a scheduled visit. Some will not reschedule a patient after the second failure. My recommendation is to do all you can to keep future visits that you reserve, or provide as much notice as possible to avoid the embarrassment and frustration a failed visit causes. Check with your office about their policy.