



A Message to Parents and School Administrators Regarding School Absence for Dental Appointments

Tooth decay in children is painful, just as it is in adults. Although largely preventable with proper home care and regular professional visits, untreated dental decay diminishes the child's ability to eat well, sleep well, and function well at home or at school. The unesthetic nature of dental decay and dental malocclusion compromise the child's self-esteem and social development. Prevention, early diagnosis, and treatment of oral health conditions require professional care.

The **California Society of Pediatric Dentistry** and the **California Dental Association** recognize the importance of regular school attendance and the effect of chronic absence on academic performance. We encourage our members to work with parents and educators to minimize school absence whenever possible. It is not feasible, however, to provide all care children need during non-school hours. For this reason, **school policies that prevent legitimate school absence for the purpose of health care visits harm children and are in violation of the California Education Code.**

California Education Code §48205(a)(3) provides that a pupil shall be excused from school when the absence is for the purpose of having medical, dental, optometrical, or chiropractic services rendered.

The **California Society of Pediatric Dentistry** and the **California Dental Association** urge parents, school administrators and member dentists to work together to ensure that children receive needed care while minimizing school absences.

Children's Oral Health Facts

- Tooth decay is the number one chronic health problem of children.
- Dental disease is infectious and progressive. The bacteria that cause it are transmissible and the disease is preventable.
- Children need their teeth to eat properly, talk, smile, and feel good about themselves. Children with cavities may have difficulty eating, smiling, and have problems paying attention and learning at school.
- By kindergarten, more than 50% of children in California have already experienced dental decay, 28% have untreated decay and 19% have extensive decay.¹
- By 3rd grade, over seventy percent of California's children have experienced dental decay.¹
- It is estimated that more than 1/2 million of California's children missed school in the previous 12 months due to dental problems²
- Left untreated, dental decay can become severe enough to require emergency room treatment.

1. "Mommy, It Hurts to Chew." The California Smile Survey: An Oral Health Assessment of California's Kindergarten and 3rd Grade Children, February 2006

2. California Health Interview Survey 2003