

Risks from Dental X-rays

facts for patients

“Are dental X-rays dangerous?”

The amount of radiation received from a dental X-ray is usually extremely small. The dose from an X-ray of a single tooth is less than the amount of radiation we receive from natural background sources of radiation every day. A panoramic X-ray of your whole mouth is equivalent to only two days' of natural background radiation. A cone beam CT X-ray examination gives a higher dose, which is equivalent to around one month of natural background radiation, but this is considered justified because of the extra clinical information it provides.

Doses and risks are kept as low as possible with modern X-ray techniques and equipment and your dentist will take care to only use X-rays only when necessary.

“Why wasn't I offered a lead apron or other protection during my X-ray?”

Research has shown that there is no benefit to the patient resulting from the use of lead aprons or thyroid shields during general dental X-rays, and that these can slightly increase the dose from the procedure. The use of a lead apron may be regarded as prudent for a pregnant (or possibly pregnant) female in the very rare cases where the beam is directed towards her abdomen.

“How often can I have an X-ray?”

There is no limit on the number of X-rays that you can have and your dentist will decide when they are necessary. Your dentist will probably suggest having X-rays if you are a new patient. After that, X-rays may be required every 6 to 24 months, depending on your history of tooth decay, age and the condition of your mouth. UK law requires that X-rays are only taken where there is justification.

“Should I have an X-ray if I'm pregnant?”

The dose to the unborn child from a dental X-ray is effectively nil in most situations and the X-ray procedure does not present any risk during pregnancy. As such, your dentist is not normally required to enquire about your pregnancy status and may carry out the X-ray even if it is known that you are pregnant. Very rarely, the X-ray beam may be pointed directly towards your abdomen and in such cases your dentist will ensure you are not pregnant or use lead protection over your belly.

“Why do the staff leave the room during the X-ray?”

The staff may take hundreds of X-rays every week and they limit the amount of radiation they receive by moving away from the X-ray source. However, the risk to individual patients from routine X-rays is extremely small.

“How do I know my dentist's X-ray equipment is safe?”

All X-ray equipment is thoroughly tested by qualified technicians at routine intervals. These tests ensure that the equipment is safe, performing to the required standards and that radiation doses are within UK guidelines.

For further information,
please contact Dent RPA Ltd at info@dentrpa.com

