Dental X rays For Children:  
What Parents Should Know

X rays are invisible beams of energy that pass through the body to make black and white pictures of your child’s teeth and bones. X rays are a form of radiation. When the x-ray picture is taken your child has to sit still for a couple of seconds. Sometimes you may be asked to help your child sit still while the x-ray picture is taken.

Some dentists take x-ray pictures using films that are placed in the mouth. These are then processed to make the picture. Other dentists use plastic sensors directly connected to a computer using a wire and you can instantly see the picture.
Radiation Source*  | Days of Background Radiation
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Background | 1 day
Airline Passenger (4 hour flight) | 1 day
2 Dental Bitewing X rays | 1 day
1 Dental Panoramic X ray | 1 day
1 Dental Cone Beam CT | 2-20 days
1 Head CT | 243 days

How can we reduce the radiation to my child?

The amount of radiation from one dental x-ray picture is very small. Still, it is important to keep the radiation amount as low as possible. Your dentist will balance the benefit of the x-ray picture and the potential small risks of using x rays. Different x-ray pictures are chosen based on the dental care needed.

There are ways to make sure your child is exposed to the lowest amount of radiation possible during an x-ray picture. The Image Gently campaign suggests making sure that your dentist uses the following:

- X-ray pictures based specifically on your child’s needs, not merely as a routine test
- Up to date equipment and techniques
- Thyroid collars to protect the thyroid gland from radiation (it is particularly sensitive to radiation) and protective shields as needed for other parts of the body
- Child-size exposure times
- Cone-beam CT only when necessary

Who should I talk to if I still have concerns about dental x rays for my child?

You should first talk to your child’s dentist and you can share the information in this brochure. Second, you can visit the Image Gently website at:

www.imagegently.org.

There is information on this website for everyone who plays a role in the child’s dental health including; parents, technologists, medical physicists, and dentists. There are also additional links to other helpful websites.