



# Back to School

A DENTAL CHECKUP SHOULD BE PART OF EVERY CHILD'S EARLY FALL ROUTINE

BY JOHN BYRD



*Dr. Sharif, who has been practicing for 23 years, is a diplomate of the American Board of Pediatric Dentistry and an assistant professor at Howard University.*

While the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) recommends an assessment of a child's dental health by their first birthday, 97% of respondents to the question of *when* regular dental treatment should begin were unaware of this significant finding. It's an indicator of our country's increasingly sophisticated approach to health issues, however, that data unequivocally points to how early in life tooth decay and other oral diseases can take hold.

On a similar note, Fairfax County has long required that children undergo a professional dental examination before starting school. This common-sense criteria simply aims at establishing a good-health benchmark early in life.

As your kids return from summer vacation and begin shopping for clothing and supplies, a top parental priority is to include a dental check-up on your child's back-to-school list.

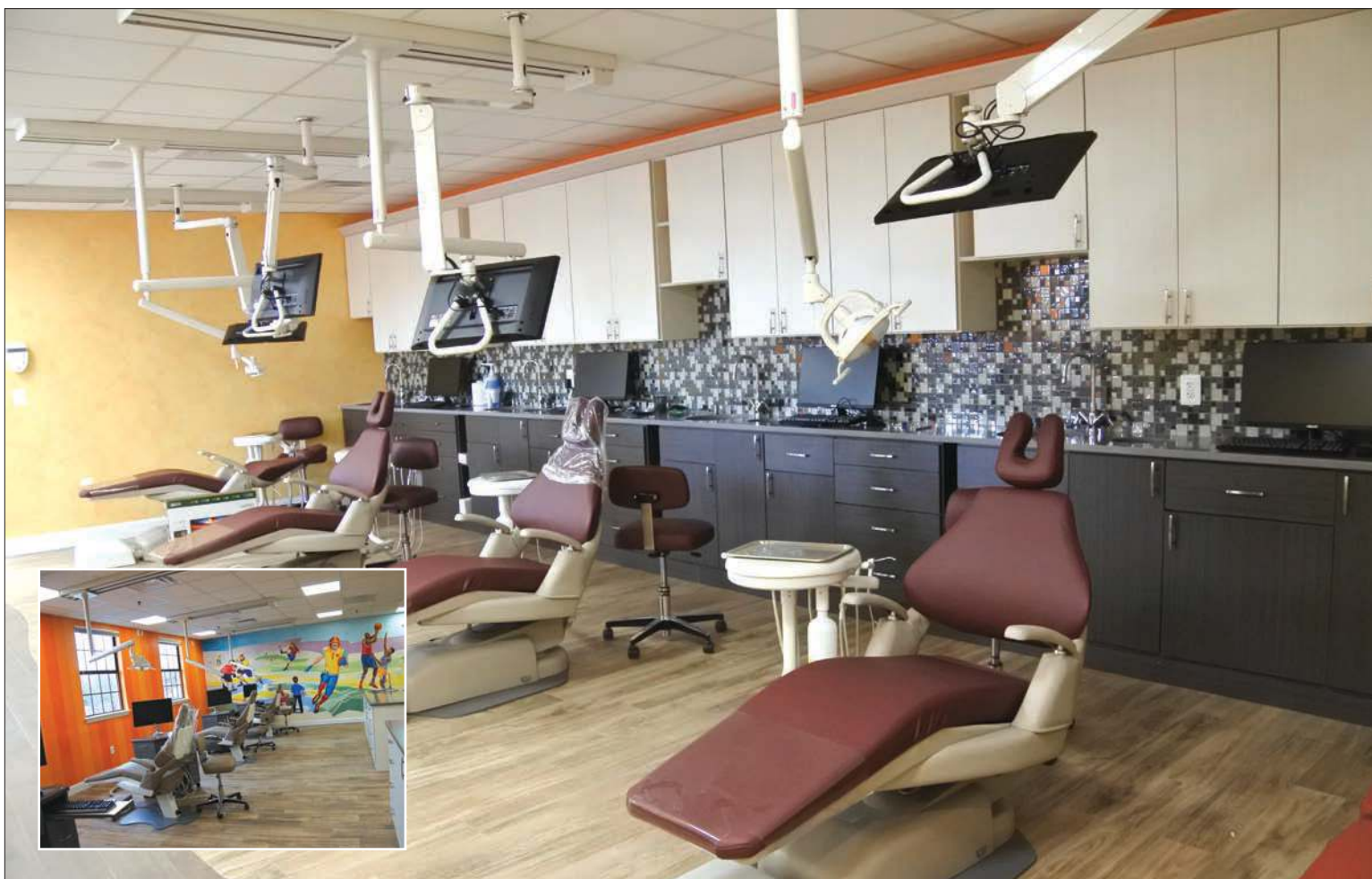
As Katina Morelli, DDS, dental director for Delta Dental of Illinois, notes: "A dental checkup should be part of every child's back-to-school routine. Despite advances, tooth decay is one of the most common childhood diseases, with more than half of children ages 5 to 9 having had at least one cavity or filling."

Some dental monitoring tips for parents:

*Keep Kids' Mouths Healthy:* Parents and caregivers should watch over or assist in their kids' tooth brushing abilities until they're at least eight years old. This should be done at least twice per day.

*Pick the right toothbrush:* Kids should use a soft toothbrush that allows them to reach all areas of their mouth. Remember, replace toothbrushes every three to four months, and even sooner if the bristles are worn out, or if your children have been sick.

*Floss Teeth:* Kids should clean between their teeth once a day, every day, with floss or flossers to remove



plaque and food where a toothbrush can't reach.

**Attack Plaque:** Plaque is a sticky film of germs that forms on teeth and gums after eating. Plaque that's not removed by brushing twice a day can lead to cavities.

**Visit Your Dentist:** It's important to visit your dentist regularly your whole life, starting no later than age one. Seeing a dentist regularly is important for good oral health as dentists can detect small problems before they become bigger and more painful.

Helping young people gain the awareness and skills needed to self-actualize a daily oral hygiene routine has long been one of the primary missions of Greater Washington Dental, which opened a second office in Merrifield earlier this year.

"We offer more than 23 years of experience in helping children and teens develop habits that will serve them for a lifetime," says Dr. Shohreh Sharif, who founded the practice. "We're now seeing patients who started with us as pre-schoolers returning with children of their own. This is very gratifying. Getting to know the long-term needs of families over time is the very heart of what it means to serve your community as a caring professional."

Perhaps more importantly, Greater Washington Dentistry offers specialties in both pediatric dentistry and orthodontics in combination with general dentistry.

"We've continually expanded the practice to reflect evolving treatment solutions, and to stay ahead of the needs of a dynamic population," says Dr Sharif, who is a

*Diplomate* on the American Board of Pediatric Dentistry and an assistant professor at the Howard University College of Dentistry. "Fairfax County is one of the best educated communities in the United States, and people expect professional services to be the best anywhere."

That said, Dr. Sharif sees requirements that children complete a dental examination before registering for school to be an indicator of an enlightened community.

"The important point for us is setting-up appropriate early treatment programs for younger people," Dr. Sharif says. "As a society, we've moved away from the old reactionary response to preventative measures, and this shift has produced a healthier world."

Thinking back, Dr. Sharif – who is a *diplomate* of the American Orthopedic Society – cites a string of patient case histories that have shaped her philosophy, and the dynamic of her practice.

"Children don't readily take to oral hygiene, nor is establishing good habits something that comes easily," she summarizes. "More than anything, we want our message that we care about our patient's long-term health to resonate with the whole family. This reinforces a child's desire to embrace good lifetime habits."

"It's especially gratifying when a young person thanks us for their healthy mouth and pretty smile," Sharif reflects. "As young people mature, they learn from their life experiences that good oral health and an attractive smile are real assets – a gift from a loving family."

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