

# Modifying the Frequency of Dental Radiographs

In 2004, the guidelines for routine dental radiographs were revised by the Department of Health and Human Services, the Food and Drug Administration and the American Dental Association.<sup>1</sup> These groups recommended that patients at a low risk of dentistry's chronic diseases, cavities and periodontal diseases, receive less frequent exposures to dental x-rays. Delta Dental of Wisconsin, using this report, other reviewed scientific literature and its own claims data, recommends that groups alter their benefits for x-rays to reflect this new and compelling data. This recommended change is both health-conscious (lower routine exposure to ionizing radiation while preserving diagnostic needs) and cost conscious.

Dental radiographs are valuable diagnostic aids in specific situations. This diagnostic benefit is constantly balanced against the risks associated with added exposure to x-ray radiation. Radiographs should be taken only when the diagnostic yield is expected to affect the patient's care. The more frequent use of x-rays in those at low risk for disease is discouraged.

**Delta Dental of Wisconsin Recommends:**

Bitewing x-rays limited to one time per 12-month period. Full-mouth x-rays limited to once every five years.

The guidelines outlined in the FDA report reflect the decreased speed of progression of dental diseases, the decreased incidence of these diseases in U.S. populations<sup>2</sup>, and the increased diagnostic quality of modern radiographs.<sup>3</sup>

Delta Dental of Wisconsin has introduced a plan design change option for groups that takes into consideration the FDA guidelines (see shaded box). The cost impact is a 0.5% decrease vs. current standard coverage; the cost impact for groups not offering standard x-ray coverage may vary.

Modernizing dental benefits to reflect the disease patterns of today is one of the ways Delta Dental helps employers manage the health of their employees and their employees' families. Appropriately limiting the recall radiographic benefit to lower radiation exposure while still providing the necessary adjunctive diagnostic services, is one way of meeting the community's changing health care needs.

<sup>1</sup> The selection of patients for dental radiographic examinations – FDA – ADA – 2004.

<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Dental Research. Oral health of United States children. The National Survey of Dental Caries in U.S. School Children:1986-1987. National and regional findings. Bethesda, MD: U.S. Public Health Service, Department of Health and Human Services. National Institutes of Health, 1989; NIH publication no. 89-2247.

<sup>3</sup> White SC, Heslop EW, Hollender LG, Mosier KM, Ruprecht A, ShROUT MK. Parameters of radiologic care: An official report of the American Academy of Oral Maxillofacial Radiology. Oral Surg Oral Med Oral Pathol Oral Radiol Endod 2001;91:498-511.

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