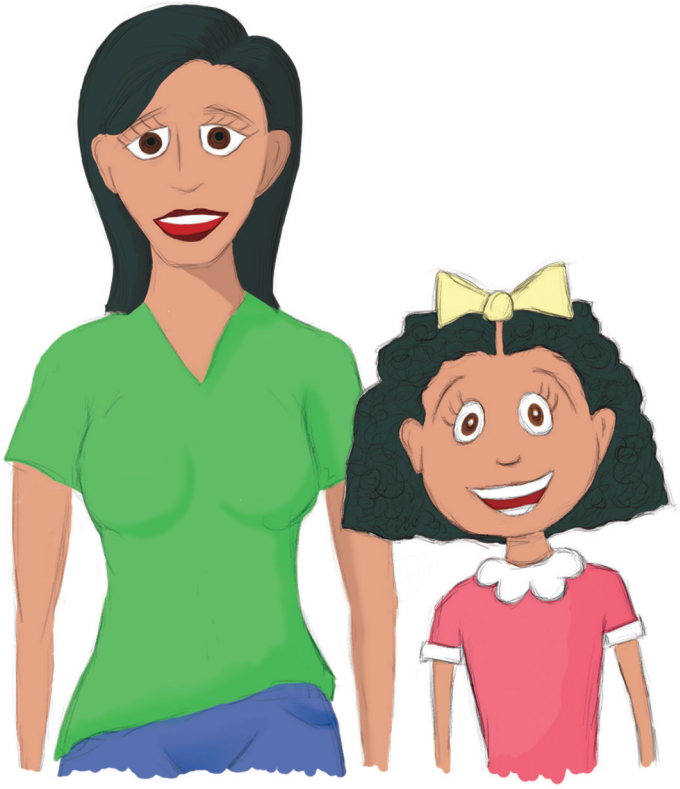
getting the Best Dental Care for Your child



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Content Summary

Your child's Medicaid program allows for routine and preventive dental care visits each year. These visits help prevent dental problems and help catch dental problems early. When your child's teeth need treatment, be sure to talk with the dentist and to ask questions. Discussing your child's dental treatment plan helps you and the dentist make the right decision for your child.

If you are unsure of the treatment plan or if your child had unexplained treatments, ask the dentist to explain. You can also ask for proof of what services the dentist billed. Improper services could be fraud, and fraud should be reported. Your involvement in your child's dental care is good for your child, good for the dentist, and good for the Medicaid program.

Going to the Dentist

Regular visits to the dentist are very important to your child's health and growth. Children may eat better and do better in school if their teeth are not hurting. To help keep your child's teeth healthy, the Medicaid program allows for certain routine and preventive dental visits and treatments every year. These visits can be for checkups to keep your child's teeth and gums healthy or for treating problems with the teeth and gums. Your child might be looking forward to the visit, or your child may be nervous. To improve the chances that going to the dentist will be a positive experience for your child, ask the dentist to tell you and your child what will be done at each visit. Dentists work with you and your child to promote healthy teeth.

If something does not seem right, ask questions. If you suspect something is wrong, ask the dentist to explain. The dentist should also give you a list of the services provided during the visit. If you are not satisfied with what the dentist tells you, there could be fraud, and fraud is against the law. The last part of this booklet will tell you how you can report fraud. First, let's talk about checkups and treatment visits.

Checkups

Dentists suggest that children have regular checkups, typically twice a year, starting at the age of 6 months.[1] State Medicaid programs cover routine checkups at least to age 18.[2] Each State's Medicaid program has rules for how often and when routine dental checkups are covered. Your local Medicaid office can answer questions about benefits in your State.

Checkups include some basic services, such as X-rays and cleanings. On the other hand, treatment involves more steps.

Treatment Visits

Your child may have many dental problems that need treatment. In deciding how to treat these problems, your child's dentist has to consider many things, including your child's reaction to treatment.

The dentist may plan to finish the treatment in only one visit, or may need your child to come back for several visits to finish the treatment. In some cases, difficult treatments may need to be done in a hospital.

The dentist will discuss the plan of care with you, including the recommended treatment and your concerns. By knowing the treatment plan, you can make good decisions for your child.

Treatment Plans

Your child's teeth may not be as healthy as Tommy's. Your child's teeth may have cavities and may need fillings or other treatment.

When your child has cavities or other tooth problems, the dentist will decide what treatment is best and make a treatment plan. The choices might be confusing so you should ask the dentist to explain the plan. To treat a tooth, the dentist may:

- Place a filling in the tooth;
- Place a cap or crown on the tooth; or
- Pull the tooth if it cannot be saved.

Listen to the dentist's explanation of the treatment plan and ask questions. You also have the right to tell the dentist if you think the plan is wrong.

A Sample Treatment Plan

During a regular checkup, the dentist found that 6-year-old Tia had four teeth with tooth decay, or cavities. A back tooth had a large cavity. The dentist planned to remove the decay from the back tooth and place a metal cap on it. Two of the teeth would only need small fillings. The fourth tooth was a front baby tooth that was loose. The dentist planned to pull that tooth instead of filling it.

What Happened on the Day of the Treatment?

The dentist numbed the areas of Tia's mouth where the back tooth and the two other teeth that needed fillings were located. After the teeth were numbed, he treated the teeth by removing the decay and placing fillings.

The dentist explained each step of the treatment to Tia, and another person in his office stayed near Tia at all times. Tia remained calm, and the treatment followed the plan of care.

Getting to the Dentist

Tommy and Tia were able to get good dental care because someone took them to the dentist's office. Some parents are able to do this, but others do not have a car or adequate public transportation available to take their child to dental appointments. Under Federal law, in these situations Medicaid programs have to provide transportation for needed dental care.[3] If you need help with transportation, call your Medicaid office. A link to each State's Medicaid website is posted to https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid-chip-program-information/by-state/by-state.html on the Medicaid website.

If you arrange for a ride paid for by Medicaid, it is important that you be on time for the pickup. You cannot use the ride to go to other places, such as a shopping mall or a friend's house. If you cannot go to an appointment, it is important to call the dentist's office as soon as possible to let the people there know. That way, someone else who needs an appointment may be able to get one sooner.

If the ride does not show up on time, call the number that you used to set up the ride. Then call the dentist's office to explain if you will be late. Some Medicaid programs may also be able to provide reminders about appointments. If you miss an appointment without telling the dentist office, you may receive a call from Medicaid about setting up another appointment.

Some parents are not able to take time off from their jobs to take their child to the dentist during the day. Some Medicaid offices may be able to give information about dental offices that have evening and weekend hours.[4]

Dentists Who Do the Wrong Thing—Report Them!

Like the dentists who treated Tommy and Tia, almost all of the dentists who treat Medicaid patients work hard to do the right thing. They also take the time to explain how they plan to treat dental problems. On the other hand, a small number of dentists do bad things during treatment visits and do not explain what they are doing. These dentists are the exception, not the rule. Some of the bad things these few dentists do include:

- Providing treatment, such as baby root canals, crowns, or pulling baby teeth, when treatment is not needed;[5]
- Performing fillings on healthy teeth;
- Continuing treatment when the child is screaming; and
- Not giving pain medicine to a child during a treatment that causes a lot of pain.[6]

By doing these things, a few dentists are hurting patients and cheating Medicaid. Medicaid pays dentists to give good dental care to patients, not to hurt them or give treatment that is not needed. If you wonder whether a dentist is hurting patients or cheating Medicaid, ask the dentist to explain. If you do not get an answer, or are not satisfied with the answers you get, there are two offices you can tell about the problem. These offices will not know about the problem if you don't call.

The first office is your State Medicaid office. Medicaid has people to listen to and investigate complaints about dentists cheating Medicaid. You can contact Medicaid at the same location where you signed up or through the Medicaid website.

The second office you can tell about problems with dental care is the Office of Inspector General (OIG). Like the people in the Medicaid office, the OIG also has people to follow-up on complaints. You can contact the OIG by:

- Calling 1-800-HHS-TIPS (1-800-447-8477); or
- Visiting the OIG's website at https://forms.oig.hhs.gov/hotlineoperations/ and emailing your complaint.

When in doubt, check it out!

Reporting is not the only thing you can do to protect your child's health if you have doubts about whether the dentist is doing the right thing. You can also contact the State Medicaid office to find other dentists who are available to treat your child.

Conclusion

Medicaid wants your child to get the dental care they deserve. By doing the things that this booklet talks about, you can help your child have healthier teeth and can help protect Medicaid.

To see the electronic version of this booklet and the other products included in the "Medicaid Compliance for the Dental Professional" Toolkit posted to the Medicaid Program Integrity Education page, visit https://www.cms.govMedicareMedicaid-Coordination/FraudPreventionMedicaid-IntegrityEducation/edmiclanding.html on the CMS website.

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