



MEDIA RELEASE

August 12, 2008

Teeth whitening safest with qualified dentist

Alberta dentists are concerned that some people are having their teeth whitened in hair salons or kiosks rather than dental offices, and are potentially at risk for infection or other teeth and gum problems. Many of these patients show up in dental offices after their kiosk treatment because their teeth are aching or there are other complications.

“Teeth whitening should only be performed in a dentist’s office,” said Dr. Jonathan Skuba, past-president of the Alberta Dental Association and College. “The main concern is that most non-dentists lack basic oral health care knowledge, so they can’t recognize when whitening shouldn’t be done or whether the person will obtain desired results. There is also a concern about infection control in these environments. Dental offices operate under strict infection prevention and control standards that cannot be maintained in a non-clinical setting.”

Professional whitening should not be used on pregnant or lactating women, children under 13 years, or people with untreated tooth decay, failed fillings or gingivitis. “A dentist will examine the patient’s teeth and oral condition to make sure whitening is safe for them,” said Dr. Skuba. “If it’s not, they will first treat the source of the problem before proceeding. This advance consultation is the main reason that whitening belongs only in dental offices.”

Failure to take care of problems in advance may result in the whitening compound entering a decayed area and causing further damage, or in inflammation of the gums. In addition, light based techniques, one of several treatments to whiten teeth, should not be used on people who are light sensitive or taking light sensitive medication, are undergoing photo chemotherapy for skin conditions, or have melanoma.

Teeth whitening is only done for esthetic reasons. However, certain conditions may inhibit results or be resistant to treatment. Some stains, such as tetracycline stains, cannot be removed by whitening and porcelain crowns can be damaged during treatment.

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Most dentists in Alberta offer teeth whitening services, and many such procedures are performed each year. There are many different methods in use including one visit in-office whitening, gels applied in take-home trays and professionally applied whitening varnishes applied with or without the use of light (light speeds up the process). All treatments involve the application of a peroxide-based agent which oxidizes away stains, and costs depend on the technique chosen.

During the procedure, patients may feel nothing, or experience tooth or gum sensitivity, even when conditions are optimal. In a dentist's office, steps are taken to minimize the sensitivity such as the use of pre- or post-treatment fluoride applications or rinses. Dentists also have access to materials that protect the gums during whitening, and the training and equipment to deal with side effects. They also provide important post-operative steps such as prescribing anti-inflammatories to avoid discomfort.

The frequency of whitening varies by patient. People who smoke or ingest a lot of staining food in their diet (coffee, red wine, cola) will accumulate stain faster. Dr. Skuba advises his patients to wait at least a year before repeating a professional-whitening procedure – most wait several years, returning only when the accumulation of stain becomes obvious again.

Home-whitening kits are generally safe, especially those provided by a dentist. Over-the-counter whitening kits, while safe, have a lower potency and only remove light staining.

“The bottom line is that dentists should do teeth whitening,” concluded Dr. Skuba. “We have the knowledge to look at the overall condition of the teeth and gums, and advise patients if the results they could realistically achieve warrant the cost and risk of the whitening procedure. Our offices and equipment are sterile and safe, and we are able to deal with any possible side effects. It's our business to ensure your teeth and gums are healthy.”

To find out more about oral health and treatment, talk to your dentist or go to the Alberta Dental Association and College website www.abda.ab.ca.

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