

Pediatric Sedation

By Dr. Chiann Fan Gibson

Many parents have heightened anxieties about pediatric dental sedation as a result of the recent tragic death of a 5-year-old Chicago girl after she received treatment at a dental clinic.

As a general dentist specializing in cosmetic dentistry, I am not an expert in pediatric sedation. When I have a child in need of this treatment, I refer my patients to a specialist who deals specifically with this component of treatment.

Philip H. Hunke, D.D.S., M.S.D, President of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, said sedation is safe for children.

"Sedation is a safe procedure that allows a child to cope better with dental treatment. This can help prevent injury to the child from patient movement and promote a better environment for providing dental care, which is integral to quality care," Hunke said in a statement.

According to the AAPD, children who have a level of anxiety that prevents good coping skills or are very young and do not understand how to cope in a cooperative fashion should be sedated. Parents should discuss all sedation options with their pediatric dentist.

The AAPD offered the following additional recommendations:

Parents should be aware of special instructions from their pediatric dentist prior to and following the sedation appointment.

To alleviate potential anxiety in your child, your pediatric dentist may recommend minimal discussion of the dental appointment with your child. Should your child become ill, contact your pediatric dentist to see if it is necessary to postpone the appointment. It is very important to follow the directions of your pediatric dentist regarding fasting from fluids and foods prior to the sedation appointment.

Your pediatric dentist should not discharge your child until the child is alert and ready to go. Children who have been sedated are usually requested to remain at home for the rest of the day with adult supervision. Discuss specific post-sedation instructions with the dentist, including appropriate diet, physical activity and requested supervision.