Policy on Emergency Oral Care

Latest Revision

2026

How to Cite: American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. Policy on emergency oral care. *The Reference Manual of Pediatric Dentistry*. American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry; 2026:79.

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recognizes emergency care for infants, children, adolescents, and individuals with special health care needs is an essential duty of every dentist. Dental emergencies include, but are not limited to, facial swelling, infections, uncontrolled bleeding, pain, and orofacial trauma.[1] Availability of emergency care during and after-hours is an important aspect of continuous, accessible care provided through a dental home.[2] The American Dental Association's *Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct* states that "dentists shall be obliged to make reasonable arrangements for the emergency care of their patients of record".[3] The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry encourages oral health care professionals to educate patients and their families on what constitutes a dental emergency, how to access emergency dental care during and after business hours, and the importance of follow-up through the patient's dental home. Likewise, primary care providers can help facilitate timely access to urgent dental care by informing families about dental emergencies and providing contact information or locations to access a dentist, including after-hours emergency care. When patients face barriers to timely in-person emergency care (eg, distance, lack of provider availability), teledentistry may be utilized to provide initial assessments and make time-sensitive recommendations (eg, reimplantation of an avulsed tooth).[4] Additionally, when consulted for a dental emergency by an individual who is not a patient of record, the dentist should make reasonable arrangements for emergency dental care. If emergency dental treatment is provided, the dentist should encourage the patient to return to his dental home unless a different preference is expressed.[3]

This document was developed by the Policy and Review Committee and adopted in 1976.[5] This policy was updated by the Council on Clinical Affairs from the last revision in 2021.[6]

References

1. What constitutes a dental emergency? American Dental Association. March 31, 2021. Accessed May 15, 2026. https://www.ada.org/-/media/project/ada-organization/ada/ada-org/files/resources/coronavirus/covid-19-practice-resources/ada_covid19_dental_emergency_dds.pdf
2. American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. Policy on the dental home. *The Reference Manual of Pediatric Dentistry*. American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry; 2026:43-45.
3. American Dental Association. *Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct*. American Dental Association; 2025:9. Accessed February 28, 2026. https://www.ada.org/about/principles/code-of-ethics
4. American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. Policy on teledentistry. *The Reference Manual of Pediatric Dentistry*. American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry; 2026:77-78.
5. American Academy of Pedodontics. Emergency dental care for children. May 1976. *American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry Reference Manual 1991-1992*. American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry; 1991:26.
6. American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. Policy on emergency oral care for infants, children, adolescents, and individuals with special health care needs. *The Reference Manual of Pediatric Dentistry*. American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry; 2021:63.