

Grills, 'grillz' and fronts

Some celebrities have been flashing more than clean, white teeth at their fans. Under the spotlight, the glint from their mouths comes from “grills” or “grillz,” decorative covers often made of gold, silver or jewel-encrusted precious metals that snap over one or more of their teeth.

Grills, sometimes called “fronts,” generally are removable, but some wearers have had their teeth altered with gold crowns to permanently resemble a grill. Some also have tried to attach a “homemade” grill using permanent cement that is not meant for internal use and can damage the teeth and tissues.

There are no studies showing that grills are harmful to the mouth, but neither are there studies showing that their long-term wear is safe. Some grills are made from nonprecious (base) metals that may cause irritation or allergic reactions.

BOY MEETS GRILL

The trend toward tooth coverings was boosted in recent years by hip-hop icons and rappers such as Nelly and Paul Wall. Although wealthy musicians and some athletes have spent thousands of dollars to decorate their teeth with grills made of gold and platinum, most teenagers and young adults who want to emulate these celebrities do so by purchasing inexpensive do-it-yourself kits online or from local jewelers. Some jewelers and other grill vendors are unaware that, in some states, taking an impression of someone’s mouth

is considered dentistry, which requires a license.

BRUSH AND FLOSS CAREFULLY

People who wear grills should be especially careful about brushing and flossing to prevent potential problems. Food and other debris may become trapped between the teeth and the grill, allowing bacteria to collect and produce acids. The acids can cause tooth decay and harm gums. Bacteria also may contribute to bad breath. In addition, the potential exists for grills to irritate surrounding oral tissues and to wear away the enamel on the opposing teeth.

To prevent problems, people should limit the amount of time spent wearing removable grills.

Anyone who already wears a grill should remove it before eating. He or she should clean it daily to remove plaque bacteria and food debris. Also, it is impor-

tant to avoid using jewelry cleaners or any other products that are dangerous to ingest.

If someone is considering wearing a grill, he or she should talk to a dentist first. One should find out exactly what metals are in the grill. Wearers should keep their mouths clean to avoid creating a breeding ground for bacteria.

Grills might be trendy at the moment, but “pearly whites” will never go out of style. For more information on keeping teeth healthy, visit “www.ada.org”. ■

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