

Frequently Asked Questions About Preventive Dental Care for Children

What is preventive dental care for children?

Preventive dental care is all the things you do (or *should* do) to help your child take care of his or her teeth and gums: brushing, flossing, eating a healthy diet, and taking your child to the dentist regularly to help avoid dental disease.

At what age should I first take my child to the dentist?

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry and the American Dental Association recommend that a child's first visit to the dental office occur at approximately six months or when the first tooth erupts.¹ By the end of your child's first year, a dental visit should occur.²

Is it necessary for me to clean or brush my baby's teeth?

Yes, it is very important to introduce your child to the concept of teeth cleaning and brushing.

- Parents should wipe an infant's gums and teeth after each feeding, using a moist washcloth or gauze pad and water.⁸
- When one or more teeth appear, use a very small amount of fluoridated toothpaste.¹ Parents should assist children up to age seven or eight with brushing.¹

Don't cover the brush with toothpaste; young children tend to swallow toothpaste, which can cause staining of the enamel, known as fluorosis. Limiting the amount of toothpaste to no more than a pea sized dot, up until age six, can help avoid this.³

Can bottles effect a baby's oral health?

According to the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, you should avoid putting a baby to bed with anything other than water.⁴ Almost any liquid other than water; things like milk, formula, juices, and other sweet drinks such as soda, all have sugar in them, if these sugary liquids maintain contact with teeth through bottle usage, they can cause tooth decay.⁴

To help prevent decay:

- **Never put your child to bed with a bottle.**⁵ If allowing baby a bottle at nighttime or naptime, fill only with water.⁵ Children should finish bottles before going to bed.⁷
- **Only give your baby a bottle during meals.** Do not use the bottle as a pacifier; do not allow your child to walk around with it or to drink it for extended periods. These practices not only may lead to Baby Bottle Tooth Decay, but children can suffer tooth injuries if they fall while sucking on a bottle.
- **Teach your child to drink from a cup** as soon as possible, usually by 12-14 months of age.⁷ Drinking from a cup does not cause the liquid to collect around the teeth, and a cup cannot be taken to bed. If you are concerned that a cup may be messier than a bottle, especially when you are away from home, use one that has a snap-on lid with a straw or a special valve to prevent spilling.
- **Don't put your child's pacifiers, spoons, or other things in your mouth.** Infants acquire bacteria and germs in their mouths from other people. When you clean off your baby's pacifier or other item in your own mouth, you transfer bacteria directly to it, which then gets into your baby's mouth. This bacteria makes the baby's teeth more susceptible to tooth decay.⁷

What is fluoride and does my child need fluoride treatments?

Fluoride is a mineral that occurs naturally in water sources, it helps prevent or reverse the early signs of dental caries (tooth decay).⁸ Infants and toddlers may be more prone to tooth decay without adequate amounts, since it makes the enamel stronger and resistant to decay.⁸

There are many communities that have fluoride in their water supply. Water fluoridation can reduce the incidence of tooth decay by about 25%. You can ask your local water company if they add fluoride to the water in your community. Your child's dentist may recommend fluoride supplements if fluoridated water is not available in your community.⁵

What are sealants and should my child have them?

Sealants are thin plastic coatings used in the prevention of tooth decay.⁶ Tooth brushing and flossing are the most effective way to avoid decay, but sealants are very effective in the prevention of decay on pit and fissure ("nooks and crannies") surfaces of the teeth reducing the risk by 80% on molars.⁹ The process is technique sensitive, takes about five minutes and it is important that the child cooperates by sitting still. Sealants are particularly important for children who have a high risk for decay. The sealant placement will vary by the individual, but some standards for application of sealants are:

- Sealants should be applied mainly on permanent molars (1st and 2nd).⁶
- To prevent further damage to teeth, sealants can be placed over areas of early decay.⁹
- Sealants can last up to 10 years, but need to be checked at regular dental check ups for chipping and wear.⁶

Ask your dentist if sealants are appropriate for your child.

¹ American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. "Dental Care for Your Baby," <http://digital.ipcprints.com/publication/?m=17242&l=1>. Accessed 06/28/2017.

² American Dental Association, Mouth Healthy "Babies and Kids," <http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/babies-and-kids/first-dental-visit> Accessed 06/28/2017.

³ American Dental Association, Mouth Healthy "Dental Fluorosis," <http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/f/fluorosis> Accessed 7/25/2017.

⁴ National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. "A Healthy Mouth for Your Baby," <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/OralHealth/Topics/ToothDecay/AHealthyMouthforYourBaby.htm>. Accessed 06/28/2017.

⁵ The American Dental Association, Mouth Healthy "Fluoridation," <http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/f/Fluoridation>. Accessed 06/28/2017.

⁶ The National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. "Seal Out Tooth Decay," <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/OralHealth/Topics/ToothDecay/SealOutToothDecay.htm>. Accessed 06/28/2017.

⁷ American Dental Association, Mouth Healthy "Baby Bottle Tooth Decay," <http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/b/baby-bottle-tooth-decay> accessed 7/25/2017.

⁸ American Dental Association, Mouth Healthy "Healthy Habits", <http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/babies-and-kids/healthy-habits>, accessed 7/25/2017.

⁹ American Dental Association, Mouth Healthy "Sealants", <http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/s/sealants>, accessed 7/25/2017.

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