

Frequently Asked Questions About Preventive Dental Care for Children



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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.¹

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 soft cloth or soft infant toothbrush.¹

When one or more teeth appear, use a very small amount of fluoridated toothpaste twice daily.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.²

Parents should assist children with brushing until they can effectively do it themselves.

Can bottles effect a baby's oral health?

Liquids 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.³

Four things to remember;³

- Don't give your baby a bottle with sugary drinks between feedings
- Near their first birthday, teach baby to drink from an open cup
- If putting baby to bed with a bottle, only fill it with water
- Never dip bottle or pacifier in something sweet like honey, sugar or sugary drinks

Following these simple tips, can help reduce the risk of decay.

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).⁴ Infants and toddlers may be more prone to tooth decay without adequate amounts, since it makes the enamel stronger and resistant to decay.⁴

There are many communities that have fluoride in their water supply. Water fluoridation can reduce the incidence of tooth decay by about 25%.⁵ Over 70 plus years of scientific evidence has consistently indicated community water fluoridation is safe and effective in preventing tooth decay and improving dental health.⁵

If you have well water, use bottled water or another source of non-community supplied water, you may want to get it tested to understand if your child needs additional fluoride supplements. Your child's dentist can help you determine the proper amount of fluoride for your child.⁴

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.

Sealant placement varies by each child, but guidelines are⁶:

- Sealants should be applied on permanent molars soon after they come in
- Even if your water is fluoridated, sealants are still recommended. Fluoride and sealants both fight tooth decay, but in different ways. Sealants are a protective shield and fluoride works to make teeth stronger.
- Sealants can last up to 9 years. Sealants need to be checked at regular dental checkups for chipping and wear.

Ask your dentist if sealants are appropriate for your child.

1 American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, Parent FAQ: <https://www.aapd.org/resources/parent/faq/> accessed 07/27/2022.

2 American Dental Association, Mouth Healthy "Dental Fluorosis," <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/f/fluorosis>, 27/2022.

3 National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. "A Healthy Mouth for Your Baby", <https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/sites/default/files/2020-09/healthy-mouth-for-baby.pdf> Accessed 07/27/2022.

4 American Dental Association, Mouth Health "Healthy Habits", <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/babies-and-kids/healthy-habits>, accessed 07/27/2022.

5 The American Dental Association, Mouth Healthy "Fluoridation," <http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/f/Fluoridation>. Accessed 01/18/2021.

6 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Oral Health, "Dental Sealant FAQ's", https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/dental_sealant_program/sealants-FAQ.htm, accessed 07/27/2022.

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