

## Fact Sheet for Parents and Caregivers



# Tooth and Mouth Care

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Tooth decay and gum disease are the two major oral health problems. They are the most common, yet least treated of childhood diseases. For many children, dental disease interferes with eating, sleeping, speaking, playing, learning, and smiling. It is also responsible for children missing millions of school hours each year, especially low-income children and children of color, who have poor access to preventive dental care, and are thus more vulnerable.

### Keeping your child's teeth healthy

The good news is that oral diseases are almost entirely preventable. Here are some tips for preventing oral disease and infections:

- Floss and brush for two to three minutes, using little or no toothpaste. Remember that until age 8, children need adult help to brush thoroughly.
- Good nutrition, which is good for the body, is also good for the mouth. The most harmful foods are those containing sugar.
- Encourage children to drink plenty of water.
- Take your children for regular dental visits after age 3 so you can catch and correct oral/dental problems early.
- Using fluoride reduces cavities by up to 50 percent in children. Toothpaste and drinking water may have fluoride. Additional fluoride (prescribed by a dentist) is recommended for children between 6 months and 16 years of age who live in non-fluoridated areas. Discuss fluoride use with your dentist to make sure children are getting enough, but not too much.
- Use of sealants (plastic coating applied to teeth by a dentist) will help prevent tooth decay by creating a physical barrier between the teeth and plaque and food. Since permanent molars are the most at risk for decay, the six-year and twelve-year molars need sealants.
- The use of mouth protectors prevents oral/dental injuries among children involved in recreational activities such as soccer, hockey, football, and even bicycling and rollerblading. Stock mouth protectors are available in stores, and a better-fitting variety can be custom-fitted by your dentist.
- Prevent baby bottle tooth decay - don't let your child sleep with a bottle that contains anything but water. Baby bottle tooth decay occurs when a child is frequently exposed to sugary liquids such as milk, including breast milk, fruit juice, and other sweet liquids. Those liquids pool in the mouth behind the teeth, causing serious decay. Help your baby learn to drink from a cup; try to discontinue use of bottles after 12-14 months.

### Dental Insurance Resources

- Medicaid: 800-283-3221
- Child Health Plan+: 303-692-2960

In addition, community-sponsored programs have programs as well. Some clinics, dental societies, nonprofit organizations, churches, dental schools, and private practitioners have services that provide free or lower-cost care to families in need.

For more information, please contact the Child Health Promotion Program, Boulder County Public Health, 303-413-7502.

Adapted from: California Childcare Health Program