NSW Health

Healthy mouths for children under 5

Did you know?
Baby teeth are important. They help with eating, talking and how a child looks.
Tooth decay can begin as soon as a baby gets their first tooth, at around 6 months.
Once a child gets tooth decay it can get worse quickly.

Tooth decay can cause pain and infection
Children with tooth decay may have trouble eating, sleeping and talking.
Young children with tooth decay may need to go to hospital to have their teeth treated.

What causes tooth decay?
- Bacteria (germs) in the mouth feeding on the sugary drinks and starchy food you eat can damage teeth.
- Putting your baby to bed with a bottle with something sweet in it like milk, formula, fruit juice, soft drink or cordial.
- Constantly sipping on sugary drinks throughout the day.
- Drinking fruit juice, cordials and soft drinks between meals.
- Eating food like cakes, biscuits, pastries and lollies between meals.
- Eating savoury snacks that stick to teeth like potato chips, puffed rice, corn crackers and crispbreads.
- Not brushing teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.

How to keep teeth healthy
Brush teeth
- As soon as your baby's teeth appear, brush them morning and night with a soft toothbrush and water.
- From 18 months brush your child's teeth, morning and night, with fluoride toothpaste.
- Help your child brush their teeth until they are 8 years old.

Food and drinks
- Offer your child healthy snacks like cheese, vegetable sticks, fresh fruit, and plain yoghurt.
- A cup can be offered at around 6 months of age.
- You can offer water, expressed breast milk or infant formula from a cup.

Dental check-ups
- Have your child's teeth and gums checked at all child health visits.
- Have your child's teeth checked by a dental practitioner: by their 1st birthday, on a regular basis, and before they start school.

How to brush
- Use a toothbrush with soft bristles and small sized head.
- Brush twice a day.
- Use a fluoride toothpaste.

© NSW Ministry of Health. July 2024

- Spit out toothpaste but don't rinse with water.
- Brush in the morning and at night before going to bed.
- Use a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste on a soft toothbrush.
- Brush on the outside of the teeth using a circular motion. Start on one side and go all the way to the other side of the mouth.
- Brush on the inside surface of every tooth making sure that you clean down to the gums.
- Gently scrub the surfaces of the top and bottom teeth. Start on one side and follow all the way to the other side of the mouth.

NSW Public Dental Services provide free general dental care for all children under the age of 18 with a Medicare card. To access NSW Public Dental Services call: 1800 679 336

Some children (between 0 and 17 years) may be eligible for the Commonwealth Child Dental Benefits Schedule (CDBS). For more information visit: www.health.nsw.gov.au/cdbs

If you need an Interpreter Service call 13 14 50

© NSW Ministry of Health. July 2024