

Oral Health *facts*



Early Childhood Caries (tooth decay)



What is Early Childhood Caries?

Early Childhood Caries is tooth decay (or a cavity) in children under 3 years old. It may look like holes in the teeth, white spots, dark pits or broken teeth. Tooth decay can be painful and make it hard for your child to eat.

What causes tooth decay?

Tooth decay is caused by harmful germs that feed on sugar in foods and drinks. The germs make acids that dissolve the outer layer of the tooth, forming a cavity.

Are baby teeth important?

Baby teeth are needed for chewing food, proper speech, and to hold the space for adult teeth. If baby teeth are lost too early, the adult teeth can come in crooked. Take your child to the dentist when the first tooth appears, or no later than his/her first birthday. Early visits are key to your child's future dental health.

How you can protect your child's teeth:

- Start a healthy habit; don't put your baby to bed with a bottle.
- Give only formula, breast milk or water in a bottle.
- Use a clean pacifier (no honey or sugar on it).
- At 6 - 9 months, your child should begin to drink from a cup. Wean baby from the bottle by age 1.
- Germs that help cause tooth decay may pass to your child's mouth when you share food, spoons or lick the pacifier. Don't share germs.
- Limit sugar (sweet, sticky snacks, foods and drinks).
- Wipe your baby's gums and teeth after each feeding and at bedtime with a clean washcloth or use a soft, infant toothbrush.
- Unless it's mealtime, sippy cups should be for water only.
- Brush teeth twice a day. Use a smear of fluoride toothpaste, about the size of a grain of rice.
- Fluoride helps prevent tooth decay. Give your child water with fluoride. Ask your dentist or doctor if your tap water has enough fluoride.