



Protect Your Child's Smile

Prevent Early Childhood Tooth Decay

Baby teeth, or primary teeth, play an important role in developing good oral health for a lifetime. According to the American Dental Association, baby teeth:

- Hold space for adult, or permanent, teeth
- Help with chewing and speaking

The early years are a great time to establish good dental habits and teach your child that it's important to take care of their teeth and gums.

What is Early Childhood Tooth Decay?

Early Childhood Tooth Decay is a dental condition that damages the developing teeth of children between the ages of six months and four years old. It can be very painful for your child and expensive to fix if left untreated.

What causes Early Childhood Tooth Decay?

Early Childhood Tooth Decay occurs when children's teeth are harmed by frequently drinking from bottles or sippy cups that contain sweetened milk, juice, soda or other sugary liquids. The sugar attacks your child's teeth, which causes them to decay. It's important to know that almost all liquids, including milk, formula, juices and other sweet drinks contain sugar.

How can I protect my child's teeth?

- Don't fill your child's bottle or sippy cup with sweetened milk, soda or other sugary drinks
- Don't put your child to bed with a bottle. If your baby needs to be comforted, use either a bottle filled with plain water only or a clean pacifier
- Teach your child to drink from a cup by 12 months of age
- Clean your child's teeth and gums with a clean washcloth or a soft toothbrush at least once a day, preferably before bedtime
- Make sure your child gets the right amount of fluoride each day. Ask your dentist or doctor if your water contains fluoride

When should my child see a dentist?

When your child's first tooth appears – or when your child turns one – it's time to make that first dental appointment.

An age-one visit helps:

- Make sure no cavities are forming on the teeth your child has
- Build a relationship with your child's dentist
- Make sure that your child's gums, jaw and tongue are healthy

Get your child started on a lifetime of healthy smiles. For more information, talk with your dentist or visit mouthhealthy.org.