

## Infant Dental Care

Good dental health care for your baby is an important step towards a lifetime of healthy teeth.

### When will my child get teeth?

First Teeth	When Teeth Come In	When Teeth Fall Out
<b>Upper</b>		
central incisors	7 - 12 mos.	6 - 8 yrs.
lateral incisors	9 - 13 mos.	7 - 8 yrs.
canines (cuspid)	16 - 22 mos.	10 - 12 yrs.
first molars	13 - 19 mos.	9 - 11 yrs.
second molars	25 - 33 mos.	10 - 12 yrs.
<b>Lower</b>		
second molars	20 - 31 mos.	10 - 12 yrs.
first molars	12 - 18 mos.	9 - 11 yrs.
canines (cuspid)	16 - 23 mos.	9 - 12 yrs.
lateral incisors	7 - 16 mos.	7 - 8 yrs.
central incisors	6 - 10 mos.	6 - 8 yrs.

Children have their own schedule for teething. Most children begin teething at about six months and most "baby" teeth are in by three years of age. The bottom front teeth usually appear first, followed by the top front teeth.

### Teething

Although many babies have no teething problems, teething can cause some discomfort, making the baby irritable or fussy. The baby may also not want to eat.

Teething does not cause fevers. If your baby has a fever or diarrhea while teething, treat it appropriately as you would at any other time. If you have any questions or concerns about your baby's fever or diarrhea, call the BC NurseLine or your health care provider.

Your baby may feel better if allowed to chew on a clean, chilled teething ring or wet face cloth. Teething cookies or biscuits are **not** a good choice because they can stick to your baby's teeth and cause tooth decay.

*Check with a health care provider before using teething gels or tablets, or ointments.*

### What is early childhood tooth decay?

Tooth decay is caused by bacteria in the mouth. This can be passed onto the baby. If family members have healthy teeth, they will pass on less cavity-causing bacteria to the baby.

Your baby's teeth can start to decay from the first day they appear. The decay often starts along the gum line behind the top front teeth, which makes it hard to see. It spreads to the front of these teeth and can often affect all your baby's teeth.

### How can early childhood tooth decay be prevented?

Good dental health care for your child includes cleaning and wiping your child's mouth everyday with a clean wet face cloth or a soft baby toothbrush. Cleaning and checking your child's mouth and teeth regularly can ease teething discomfort and prevent early childhood tooth decay.

Once teeth appear, it is important to make a habit of cleaning your child's teeth twice a day. Gently clean your baby's teeth using a soft baby toothbrush or wet face cloth with a smear of toothpaste containing fluoride. Lift the lip so you can see along the gum line when cleaning. One cleaning should be after the last feeding of the day.

Reduce the chance of passing harmful bacteria onto your child by not sharing toothbrushes, not licking soothers to clean them, and not testing the baby's food with the same spoon.

The Canadian Dental Association recommends regular dental visits beginning six months after the first tooth appears, or at about one year of age.

Your child's first dental visit is a good time to discuss daily dental care, including fluoride and eating habits.

If you have a concern about your baby's teeth, make an appointment to see your dentist.

### What about fluoride?

The Canadian Dental and Medical Associations and the dental professionals of British Columbia recommend fluoride for preventing tooth decay for people of all ages.

Fluoride is a proven, effective and low cost way to prevent cavities. Teeth are not fully formed when they first appear, and fluoride helps them be more resistant to decay.

Fluoride is added to most brands of toothpaste and found in some water supplies. Some baby toothpastes do not have fluoride so check the label for ingredients. If you are unsure if your water supply contains fluoride, call your local health unit.

### What about diet and tooth decay?

Fruit juice, sweetened tea, soft drinks, all types of milk, and formula all contain sugars that can cause tooth decay if left in contact with teeth for long periods of time. When a child uses a bottle for long periods, especially during rest or sleep times, tooth decay can develop.

Water will not harm the teeth. Water is a good choice in the sippy cup or bottle between regular feeding times. Between six and nine months of age is a good time to introduce your baby to using a cup. At this time, your baby's first teeth may be appearing so daily teeth cleaning is needed to remove food and bacteria that stick to teeth.

### What about soothers or pacifiers?

Soothers or pacifiers are sometimes given to infants during rest, sleep or other times when the baby has finished feeding but still wants to continue sucking. If you choose to give your baby a soother, here are a few tips:

- Ensure that breast-feeding is well established.
- Choose a soother that is the right size for your baby's mouth.
- Check the soother nipple often; if it is sticky, cracked or torn, throw it away.
- Clean the soother with water. You can infect your child with germs that cause tooth decay if you put the baby's soother in your own mouth to clean it.
- Soothers dipped in honey or other sweet substances can cause tooth decay.

Soothers are not recommended once all of the baby teeth have grown in, usually at about three years of age.

### For more information

For information about dental care for children, please see BC HealthFile [#19b Dental Care for Toddlers](#).

Children in families who receive income assistance or MSP premium assistance are eligible for basic dental care through the Healthy Kids Program. For more information, call 1-866-866-0800, or visit the website at [www.mhr.gov.bc.ca/factsheets/2005/healthy\\_kids.htm](http://www.mhr.gov.bc.ca/factsheets/2005/healthy_kids.htm)

**For more information on child dental care, please contact the dental program at your public health unit, your dentist or dental hygienist.**

**For more BC HealthFile topics visit [www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm](http://www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm), or visit your local public health unit.**

**Call the BC NurseLine to speak to a registered nurse, available 24-hours every day:**

- In Greater Vancouver, call 604-215-4700
- In BC, call toll-free 1-866-215-4700
- Deaf and hearing-impaired, call 1-866-889-4700
- Pharmacist available 5pm to 9am every day
- Translation services in over 130 languages upon request

**Visit BC HealthGuide OnLine – a world of health information you can trust at [www.bchealthguide.org](http://www.bchealthguide.org)**