

Dental Care For Toddlers

Healthy baby teeth and good dental care are very important.

- Healthy baby teeth will help your child look good, eat well and learn how to speak clearly.
- Baby teeth guide the healthy development of permanent teeth in their correct positions.
- Some baby teeth are not replaced by permanent teeth until the age of 12 or 13.

Your child should have all of his or her first set of teeth, or "baby" teeth, by three years of age. In total, twenty teeth should appear – 10 in the top jaw and 10 in the bottom jaw.

For more information on teething, see BC HealthFile [#19a Infant Dental Care](#) or *Toddler's First Steps*, available from your local public health unit. When teeth first come in, they are not fully formed or hardened and may decay easily. It is very important to start dental care early.

Diet and tooth decay

The most important factors related to tooth decay are which foods are eaten, how often they are eaten, and how long food stays on teeth or in the mouth.

Tooth decay is caused by bacteria on the teeth. The bacteria use starches and sugars from foods to produce acid that can break down tooth enamel and cause tooth decay. Fruit juice, sweetened tea, soft drinks, breast milk, cow's milk, and formula all contain sugars that can cause tooth decay if left in contact with teeth for lengthy periods of time.

Your toddler's teeth are at risk of decay if they are still drinking from a bottle filled with anything other than water, especially during

rest and sleep periods. There is also a risk if your child walks around with and continually sips from a bottle, drinking box, or sipper cup during the day. For information on how to stop your toddler's bottle habit, contact the public health staff at your local public health unit.

Offer your toddler healthy snack foods such as vegetables, fruits and dairy products. Follow the Three-Step Snacking Guide between regular meals:

1. Choose foods from two of the following four food groups: grains, vegetables and fruit, dairy, meat and alternatives.
2. Offer two to three snacks per day.
3. Vary your daily snack choices.

Preventing tooth decay

Brush your child's teeth using toothpaste that contains fluoride twice a day, in the morning and before going to sleep at night.

Start with a smear of toothpaste containing fluoride and work up to a "pea-sized" amount on a soft child's toothbrush once all the teeth come in. It is a good idea to gently brush your child's tongue to remove bacteria that forms there. Parents need to brush their children's teeth until they are able to write their own name. Brushing gives you the chance to lift the lip to check for any changes to your child's teeth including new teeth, plaque, white spots, and brown spots.



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.

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

When fluoride comes in contact with the tooth surface, it makes the tooth enamel stronger and more resistant to decay. That's why using toothpaste containing fluoride twice a day is so important to prevent tooth decay and keep your child's teeth clean. Some children who are at high risk of tooth decay may need additional fluoride or cleaning.

Contact your dentist or dental staff at your local public health unit for more information if you are concerned that your child is at high risk of tooth decay.

What about soothers?

Soothers or pacifiers are not recommended for toddlers. Parents can start to "wean" children off the soother as soon as possible. Soothers are not recommended once all the baby teeth have grown in, usually at about three years of age. Regular use of a soother after this age may affect the child's speech and language development. Try to limit using the soother to sleep times or times when your child is very upset and needs comforting. Gently remove the soother from the mouth after your child is asleep.

When should my child go to the dentist?

The Canadian Dental Association recommends regular dental visits starting six

months after your child's first tooth appears or erupts.

Your child's first dental visit is a good time to discuss daily dental care, fluoride, and eating habits. If you have a concern about your child's teeth, make an appointment to see your dentist or a dental professional.

For more information

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.

For more information about dental care for children, see *Toddler's First Steps*. Contact your local public health unit to receive your own copy. It is also available on the Ministry of Health website at www.health.gov.bc.ca/cpa/publications/firststeps.pdf.

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

For more BC HealthFile topics visit 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