

Washington Dental Service and Washington Dental Service Foundation
Baby Teeth Campaign
Q & A

Q. Do baby teeth matter, since they are going to fall out anyway?

A. Yes! Baby teeth matter. Healthy baby teeth are **essential** for an infant who will soon be developing language skills and chewing food. As a child grows older, healthy baby teeth and oral disease prevention help ensure healthy permanent teeth and overall good health. Children are not healthy if their mouths are not healthy.

Q. When should my child first have a dental screening?

A. *First screen by first birthday.* Your child should have his/her teeth screened by a dentist or physician when the first tooth comes in, usually between six and 12 months of age. Early intervention and preventive care will protect your child's baby teeth now and in the future.



Q. I thought it wasn't necessary to have my child's teeth looked at until age three. What's changed?

A. New technologies have emerged that can help prevent oral disease. Make sure your baby's teeth are checked by age one by a dentist or physician. Take your baby in sooner if you notice any problems.

Q. I've heard about tooth painting or varnishes. How can I learn more?

A. Ask your dentist or physician about fluoride varnish. It is a quick and effective way to help prevent and heal early tooth decay for children at risk for dental cavities.

Q. Do I need to clean my baby's mouth if there are no teeth yet?

A. Clean your baby's gums every day with a clean, damp washcloth.

Q. What do I do once teeth begin to appear?

A. Once teeth emerge, clean them daily with a soft toothbrush and a rice-sized amount of toothpaste. To clean your baby's mouth, place your baby's head in your lap to have both hands free to clean.

Q. Can babies get cavities?

A. *Yes.* As soon as teeth appear, they are at risk for decay. It is critical to keep a baby's mouth and teeth clean and healthy. Dental problems can begin early and get progressively worse. If problems are caught early, they can be reversed. Prevention is essential to protect your child from oral disease.

Q. What is “baby bottle” tooth decay?

A. Babies who go to bed with a bottle filled with milk, formula or juice are more likely to get tooth decay. When these liquids stay in contact with the teeth for a long time during the night, the teeth can decay quickly. If you put your baby to bed with a bottle, only fill it with water. Formula, milk, juice or other liquids may increase your child’s risk for cavities.

Q. Can the condition of a parent’s teeth and gums affect their child’s oral health?

A. Studies have shown that parents can pass the germs that cause oral disease to their children. Parents need to keep their teeth and gums healthy. Parents’ good oral hygiene can help prevent cavities in their baby’s mouth.

Q. How does diet affect my child’s teeth?

A. A healthy diet helps children grow and develop. Sweets (candy or cookies), starchy foods (crackers) and sticky foods (raisins) stay in the mouth longer, so they can easily cause tooth decay. For between-meal snacks, offer fruits, vegetables or cheese. Also, avoid “grazing” – snacking or sipping sweet liquids throughout the day.

Q. Besides cleaning and brushing my child’s teeth, are there other things parents can do?

A. Check your baby’s teeth often. Look for white spots on the teeth or changes to the gums. If you see spots or other changes in your baby’s teeth or gums when you “lift the lip,” call your dentist or physician.