

Tips for keeping your kids' teeth cavity free

By Shawnell Miller

Almost half of U.S. children suffer from cavities, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. During National Children's Oral Health Month, dental professionals remind parents that there is much they can do to keep their children's teeth healthy for a lifetime.

Good dental care begins before teeth erupt. Gently wipe your baby's gums with a clean, damp, soft washcloth or gauze after each feeding. Baby teeth are at risk for cavities as soon as they first appear, so start brushing your child's teeth right away.

Basic dental hygiene for adults and children includes brushing twice daily and flossing once a day.

Help brush

Children do not have the ability to do a thorough job on their own, and need your help with brushing and flossing. Around six to eight years old, children start to develop the dexterity and maturity to properly do it on their own.

Use a soft toothbrush with fluoridated toothpaste for brushing your child's teeth. Regular use of fluoride toughens the enamel, making it harder for acids to penetrate and thus for cavities to form. Use only use a smear or grain-of-rice-size amount of toothpaste until your child can fully spit out all the toothpaste. Around age, six you can increase the toothpaste to a pea-size amount.

Floss your child's teeth as soon as your child has two teeth touching. This helps keep cavities away from between the teeth where a toothbrush cannot reach.

Limit sugar

Bacteria in the mouth feed on sugar and produce acid that attacks tooth enamel, causing cavities. To prevent baby bottle tooth decay, avoid putting your child to bed with a bottle or sippy cup. Avoid sugary snacks and drinks like juices and sodas, especially between meals.

Sipping on pop and juice throughout the day is a major cavity-causing habit. Do not give your child a bottle or sippy cup filled with sweet drinks to use like a pacifier.

Don't share your germs with your child. Avoid sharing food, eating utensils and drinking cups with your child, and by not putting a pacifier in your mouth before the child's mouth.

Another way you can reduce this transmission is by brushing and flossing daily yourself, and keeping up with regular dental visits. Ideally, this should be started before pregnancy. If the cavity-causing bacteria

is not introduced in the child's mouth by 26 months of age, they are less likely to have cavities throughout their life.

First dental visit

Your child's first visit to the dentist should be scheduled by the first birthday or as soon as the first tooth starts to erupt. The dentist will check for cavities and developmental problems. Expect to get great tips to help keep your child's mouth healthy. Dentists can also provide topical fluoride varnish treatments and sealants. These painless measures help prevent cavities.

Untreated cavities can cause pain and infections that may lead to problems with learning, eating and speaking. RiverStone Health Dental Clinic encourages parents to help their children have good oral health habits and keep up with regular dental care.

Following the simple guidelines in this column will help your child have a healthy mouth for a lifetime.

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