

# Prevent Tooth Decay in Babies and Toddlers

## Baby Teeth Are Important!

- Babies and toddlers need their teeth to chew, talk, smile, feel good, and to be healthy.
- Baby teeth are also needed to save room for adult teeth. A picture of an unhealthy child with swollen face from a dental abscess is shown.
- Do you want tooth decay and an unhealthy child? A picture of a healthy, happy child with no dental disease is shown.
- Or do you want clean, healthy teeth and gums and a happy, healthy child?

## What is tooth decay (cavities)?

- It is a disease that is caused by germs in the mouth
- It can start when the first tooth appears.
- At first it may look like a chalky white line on the tooth near the gums or anywhere on the tooth. A picture of a white line on top edge of tooth near the gums is shown.
- As decay becomes more severe, dark spots or areas can be seen. A picture of very decayed, dark brown teeth is shown.
- Tooth decay can lead to pain and infection, and can destroy teeth.

## How does tooth decay happen?

Germs live on your teeth. When you eat sugar, the germs eat the sugar, then make acid. The acid attacks and eats away at the teeth. Tooth decay germs can be passed from your mouth to your child's mouth. Do not share cups, straws, spoons, forks, or toothbrushes. Do not "clean" baby's pacifier with your mouth!

When sugar stays on teeth, tooth decay can start, especially if your child falls asleep with a bottle or sips from a bottle or cup off and on all day long. Sugar hides in milk, formula, juice, sweet drinks, cereal, soda, cookies, crackers, chips, and medicine.

## What can you do to protect baby teeth?

First, take care of your own teeth:

- Brush in the morning and before bed, and floss daily.
- Use a pea-sized dot of fluoride toothpaste.
- Visit your dentist twice a year.
- Limit sweet, sticky foods, sodas and sugar-sweetened drinks.
- Chew sugarless gum or mints with **xylitol** after meals and snacks.

Take care of your baby's teeth:

- Use only breast milk or formula in bottles. No bottles in bed!
- Brush baby's teeth twice a day with a tiny (rice grain sized) dab of fluoride toothpaste.
- Start using a cup at six months. Stop the bottle by age one.
- Take the baby to the dentist by age one and then every six months thereafter.
- Ask your doctor or dentist about fluoride varnish and drops or tablets.

### **How can you check your baby's teeth?**

Each day when you clean your baby's teeth and gums:

- Lay baby's head in your lap and gently push the lips away from the teeth.
- Look at the outside and inside of all front and back upper teeth, and then look at all the lower teeth, front and back, inside and out.
- If you see chalky white, brown or black spots on the teeth, or unhealthy red or swollen gums, take baby to the dentist.

### **What should you do?**

**Take your child to a dentist by age ONE.**

**To find a dentist:**

Ask your child's doctor for a referral or ask a friend, relative, or coworker.

If you have Medi-Cal, contact Denti-Cal at 1-800-322-6384 or

<http://www.denti-cal.ca.gov/WSI/Bene.jsp?fname=ProvReferral>

You can contact the California Dental Association at 1-800-CDA-SMILE (232-7645) or

[www.cda.org/PublicResources/FindaDentist](http://www.cda.org/PublicResources/FindaDentist)

You can also contact the Child Health & Disability Prevention (CHDP) Program at your health department or

<http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/chdp/Pages/CountyOffices.aspx>