



# Dental Care for Children in Sonoma County

## Tooth Decay is the Most Common Chronic Infectious Disease in Childhood

40 percent of children have tooth decay by kindergarten. Many children have rotten teeth by the time they are 2 or 3 years old. Decay of the first teeth causes pain, school absence, poor nutrition from chewing difficulty, permanent tooth problems, low self-esteem, and rarely, a life threatening spread of infection. It is caused by mouth bacteria that are spread from parents or other caregivers by utensils, toothbrushes, and pacifier sharing. These bacteria, along with food leftovers and dead mouth lining cells, form soft plaque on the teeth. Over time the soft plaque, which can be removed by brushing, hardens and can then only be removed by professional cleaning. The bacteria in the plaque use any food around the teeth (especially sugars) to make acids which bore holes in the tooth enamel, allowing the spread of the bacterial infection into the tooth.

### Prevent decay by:

- Brushing and flossing daily to clean soft plaque and food from teeth
- Hardening teeth with fluoride
- Starving decay bacteria:
  - Stop night time feedings after teeth erupt
  - Encourage use of a cup rather than bottles
  - Avoid sweetened drinks and constant grazing on food
- Going to the dentist for preventive exams and removing any hard plaque every 6 months beginning at your child's first birthday.

## Pediatric Dental Milestones

### Prenatal through Childhood

Take care of your own mouth and teeth by brushing twice daily, flossing daily and getting regular professional care. Remember that the bacteria that cause dental decay are transmitted from you to your baby. Try to avoid getting your saliva directly or indirectly into your baby's mouth.

### 6 months

Before teeth erupt, start wiping the gums daily with a soft washcloth to get your baby used to regular mouth care. **In Sonoma, Lake, Mendocino, and Napa Counties start a fluoride supplement daily (a drop directly in the mouth works best). Please note that the city of Healdsburg has a fluoridated city water supply.** When the first teeth erupt, start cleaning them with a soft toothbrush, washcloth, or tooth cleaning finger mitt. Use water or non-fluoridated baby toothpaste twice a day including after the last feeding at bedtime. Never put your baby to bed with a bottle except with plain water (even a little bit of juice, formula, or milk mixed in the water can cause decay). Breastfeeding throughout the night can also lead to decay.

### 12-18 months

Schedule a first visit with a pediatric dentist or general dentist who is comfortable seeing young children. Brush your toddler's teeth twice a day and floss any teeth that touch together. Even if your toddler resists your attempts at brushing, it is important to keep trying. Try showing your child how you brush your teeth and give your child a toothbrush that she/he can hold while you brush her/his teeth. Take turns. Sometimes a spin brush (battery operated toothbrush) with fun characters on

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it can help. This type of toothbrush creates the proper circular action for brushing. You can also try lying your child down while brushing so that you can more easily see what you are doing. Make brushing and flossing part of your child's daily routine. Generally when your toddler understands that you are going to take care of her/his teeth no matter what (gently but firmly), she/he will cooperate.

Encourage your child to drink from a cup rather than a bottle. The liquid in a cup will be in contact with the teeth for a shorter time (or spilled all over!) than liquids from a bottle. Limit juice to ½ cup a day, and young children (and probably the rest of us) should not have sweetened beverages like soda or sports drinks. Teeth will get less decay with definite meal, morning, and afternoon snack times rather than grazing all day. Choose healthy snacks like cheese, unsweetened yogurt, fruits, vegetables, meat, and eggs. Avoid foods like candy, juices, energy drinks, cookies, pastries, and especially foods that stick to teeth like fruit snacks, fruit leathers or fruit roll-ups.

## **2 - 3 years**

Start using a fluoridated toothpaste (a half pea-sized amount), as soon as your child can effectively spit out the toothpaste at the end of brushing. Continue to floss between teeth where there are tight contacts.

## **4 years**

It is important for parents to continue to help with brushing and flossing until their child can learn to clean all tooth surfaces effectively - usually at about 8 years of age. Discourage thumb/finger sucking.

## **6 years**

Have a dentist evaluate the need for dental

sealants. Sealants help prevent tooth decay on permanent molars.

## **At Any Age**

Remember to take your child to a dentist every 6 months for exams. Prevention is the key to having a healthy mouth.

Call the dentist if your child's teeth get chipped or turn dark (usually after injury), or if a tooth is knocked loose or out. If a tooth is knocked out, rinse it gently in a bowl of water (do not clean off any tissue still attached to the tooth), and then put it into some milk for the trip to the dentist.

Like medical care, dental care can be expensive. Unfortunately dental insurance is even less available and less complete than medical insurance. Even families who have dental insurance face the problem that there are few dentists who see young children (less than 5 years old may be included in your dental plan).

Ask your dentist if she/he sees young children, or for a referral to a pediatric dentist (there is also a listing for pediatric dentists in the phonebook).

Follow these guidelines and your child will have healthy teeth and a beautiful smile. If you have concerns about your child's teeth, talk with your child's dentist or your physician.

## **Dental Resources**

**Healthy Kids Sonoma County** is a good place to call if you are not able to afford a dentist for your children 1-800-427-8982

**DentiCal** for children with MediCal insurance 1-800-322-6384

**Kaiser Permanente Child Health Dental Plan** for low income families 1-800-422-4234