

# Children's Oral Health – a basic overview of why it's important

**Author: Michael J. Pink DDS, Senior Dental Consultant, Sun Life**

We can all agree it isn't easy to get kids to brush and floss. You might even wonder if it really matters when it comes to their primary or baby teeth since they aren't permanent and will eventually fall out. I can tell you that it does.

Tooth Decay (also known as caries or cavities) are one of the most common chronic diseases of childhood in the United States<sup>1</sup>. Research shows about 20% of children under age five have experienced tooth decay<sup>1</sup>. That rises to 50% in children age six to eleven as well as 50% in those aged twelve to nineteen<sup>1</sup>. Cavities are when a tooth starts to decay by breaking down tooth enamel and begins to develop a hole. That hole will continue to grow if the decay isn't removed and the hole filled.

Untreated cavities can cause many issues for young children even in their baby teeth. These issues include infection of the teeth and gums, tooth loss and pain. How can parents help? There are many ways you can help your kids.

## Infant care:

- As soon as your baby starts getting teeth, you should use a baby toothbrush with a tiny amount of toothpaste twice a day
- Once multiple teeth have grown in you can start flossing between them daily
- The American Dental Association recommends having your baby see a dentist by the time they turn one<sup>2</sup>

## Child care:

- Teach your child to brush twice a day and floss once a day
- Visit the dentist every six months for check-ups
- Minimize the amount of sugary drinks and sodas
- Provide them with a fluoride toothpaste
- Have dental sealants applied to their permanent molars – many dental insurance plans will cover this service

One of the most important influences a parent has is having good oral care for themselves and letting your kids see it. Consider cleaning and flossing your teeth when they are doing their teeth so that they know it is a lifetime habit that will make a difference.



1. The state of little teeth. America's pediatric dentists. <http://mouthmonsters.mychildrensteeth.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/StateofLittleTeeth.2ndEdition.pdf>.

2. <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/babies-and-kids/first-dental-visit> (accessed 1/29/21)

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