

# Children's Dental Health

Your child's **first teeth** will begin coming in between three and sixteen months (usually around six months). The two bottom front teeth will be the first to come in and this will be followed by the four upper teeth in four to eight weeks. The timing of the eruption of the first tooth is largely influenced by family history so if someone in your family got their teeth late, then your child will probably also get his first teeth late.

Your child will continue to get new teeth until he has all twenty of his primary teeth when he is three years old, with most children getting about four new teeth every four months. Children begin **shedding** their first teeth when they are around 6-7 years old, and this process is complete with the loss of the 2nd molars when he is about 11-13 years old.

**Permanent teeth** come in at around 6-7 years old and continue until your child gets his third molars (or wisdom teeth) when he is about 17-22 years old.

## Does teething cause...

In most children, teething only causes increased drooling and a desire to chew on hard things, but in some it does cause mild pain and irritability and the gums may become swollen and sore. To help this you can rub the area for a few minutes or let him/her chew on a smooth, hard teething ring. Teething should not cause fever, diarrhea, sleeping problems or diaper rashes. While most children do not need teething gels or treatment with Tylenol for pain, you can use these products if needed.

## When should I begin cleaning my child's teeth?

Once your child's teeth begin coming in, you can begin wiping them with a moist washcloth. As your child gets more teeth, you can begin to use a soft child's toothbrush. You should use just a pea-size amount of a **fluoride** toothpaste or a non-fluoride toothpaste (like Baby OraGel) until your child is able to spit it out (too much fluoride can stain their teeth).

## When should I take my child to the dentist?

If your child doesn't have any **risk factors** for developing cavities, such as sleeping with a cup or bottle or walking around all day with a cup of juice, and if his teeth seem to be developing normally, then you can probably wait until your child is older and just ask your Pediatrician to check his teeth at each well child visit. Another risk factor for getting a lot of cavities can include having a mother with a lot of cavities.

If your child has any problems, such as staining of his teeth, crowding or abnormal tooth development, or if he has any risk factors for developing cavities, then he should see a dentist earlier. You may also want to see a dentist if your child has any persistent

**habits**, such as sucking his thumb or using a pacifier as a toddler or grinding his teeth at night.

If your family dentist tells you that your first visit should be delayed until he is four or five years old, then you may want to see a Pediatric dentist for the first few years.

### **Does my child need fluoride supplements?**

In general, yes. All children need supplemental fluoride after they are **six months** old to help prevent cavities. For most children, they can get this fluoride from the water they drink, if they are in an area where the city water supply has an adequate amount of fluoride in it (greater than 0.6 ppm), and they are drinking tap water (water in our community has 1ppm of naturally occurring fluoride).

Sources of water that generally don't have enough fluoride include well water and filtered or bottled water, although some brands of bottled water do have fluoride added to it. Also, commercially prepared pre-mixed infant formulas do not contain an adequate amount of fluoride, so consider using a powder or concentrated formula and mixing it with tap water.

If you only use a water filter pitcher or a counter top filter, it likely doesn't remove the fluoride from the water. Other types of water filters might though. If you have any doubt, check with the filter's manufacturer.

It is in general better to have your child drink water that is supplemented with fluoride instead of giving extra fluoride drops or supplements. Too much fluoride can cause **fluorosis**, which is permanent white to brown discoloration of the enamel of the teeth. It is easier to get fluorosis if you are giving your child fluoride drops and he is still getting fluoride from his diet.

Talk with your Pediatrician or Pediatric Dentist if you think that your child may need fluoride supplements.

### **Does my child need sealants?**

Sealants are usually applied to the back teeth to help protect the grooves and pits of these teeth that can be hard to clean and are prone to developing cavities. A sealant is a plastic material that is applied to the teeth, hardens, and provides a barrier against plaque and other harmful substances. Sealants should be applied to the 1st and 2nd permanent molars and appropriate premolars as soon as possible after they erupt (usually after 6 years of age).

### **Internet Dental Resources for Children:**

- [American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry](#): includes "24 brochures address commonly asked questions with easy-to-understand answers and illustrations.

The brochures are designed to aid communication between the dental team and parents and/or patients--or even potential patients."

- [American Dental Association](#): includes information on many oral health topics to provide you "with information and resources about various issues related to you and your family's oral health care. Also visit the "Frequently Asked Questions" section to learn more about your oral health."
- [About Pediatric Dentistry](#): Parents often have questions about how to take care of their children's teeth. When should you start brushing? What kind of toothpaste is best? When should you go to the dentist? Knowing the answers to these questions can help you keep your kids' teeth healthy and cavity free.