

# Preventing Tooth Decay in Young Children

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Tooth decay (also known as dental caries or cavities) is the most common infectious disease of childhood. Tooth decay can interfere with eating, sleeping, speaking, playing, and learning. Help your child have a healthy smile by preventing tooth decay!

## What causes tooth decay?

Tooth decay is caused by the bacteria living in your mouth. The bacteria thrive on sticky and sugary foods and produce harmful acids that cause the enamel on the tooth to decay.

## How can tooth decay be prevented?

### Avoid spreading bacteria

- Brush and floss your own teeth to avoid spreading bacteria to your child.
- Visit the dentist regularly.
- Avoid sharing utensils, toothbrushes, cups and putting pacifiers in your mouth.

### Start cleaning your child's mouth and brushing teeth early



- Wipe your infant's gums with a clean cloth daily.
- Switch to a small, soft toothbrush as teeth come in.
- Brush your child's teeth with fluoride toothpaste, every day, after breakfast and before bed.
- Help your child with tooth brushing until 8 years old.

### Serve healthy food and drinks

- Avoid sticky and sugary foods, like candy, cookies, crackers, pastries, raisins and sweetened drinks.
- Limit snacking to one morning and one afternoon snack.
- Encourage your child to drink water when thirsty.
- Don't give juice or soda in a bottle.
- Don't put infants to bed with a bottle.
- Don't give drinks (other than water) in a sippy cup to carry and sip between meals and snacks.

### Talk to your health care provider or dentist about fluoride

Fluoride helps make teeth strong and more resistant to cavities. It is found in toothpaste, drinking water and can be taken as a supplement. Fluoride varnish treatments help prevent cavities and reverse early tooth decay. Most local public water supplies add fluoride to tap water.

### Visit the dentist

Take your child to the dentist regularly starting at 12 months of age.