

# Tooth and Mouth Care

Tooth decay and gum disease are the two major oral health problems. They are the most common and least treated of childhood diseases. For many children, dental disease interferes with eating, sleeping, speaking, playing, learning and smiling. It is also responsible for children missing millions of school hours each year, especially low-income children and children of color, who have poor access to preventive dental care and are thus more vulnerable.

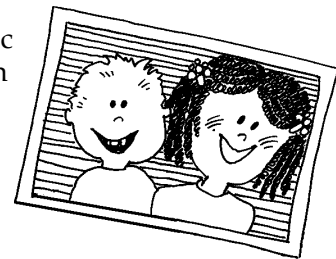
## Keeping your child's teeth healthy

The good news is that oral diseases are almost entirely preventable. Here are some tips for preventing oral disease and infections:

- Children, like adults, should brush their teeth with fluoride toothpaste twice a day—after breakfast and before bedtime at night. Remember that until age 8, children need adult help to brush thoroughly.
- Good nutrition, which is good for the body, is also good for the mouth. The most harmful foods are those containing sugar.
- Encourage children to drink plenty of water
- Take your children for regular dental visits so you can catch and correct oral/dental problems early.
- Using fluoride reduces cavities. Toothpaste and drinking water may have fluoride. Additional fluoride (supplements or varnish) is recommended for children who live in non-fluoridated areas. Discuss fluoride use with your dentist to make sure children are getting enough but not too much.



- Use of sealants (plastic coatings applied to teeth by a dentist) will help prevent tooth decay by creating a physical barrier between the teeth and plaque and food. Since permanent molars are the most at risk for decay, the six-year and twelve-year molars need sealants.
- Using mouth protectors prevents oral/dental injuries among children involved in recreational activities such as soccer, hockey, football and even bicycling and rollerblading. Stock mouth protectors are available in stores, and a better-fitting variety can be custom fitted by your dentist.
- Prevent baby bottle tooth decay—don't leave your child sleeping with a bottle that contains anything but water. Baby bottle tooth decay occurs when a child is frequently exposed to sugary liquids such as milk, including breast milk, fruit juice and other sweet liquids, and those liquids pool in the mouth behind the teeth, causing serious decay. Help your baby learn to drink from a cup; try to discontinue the use of bottles after 12-14 months.



## Dental Insurance Resources

A large number of California preschool, elementary school children and some high school students have no dental insurance. Even some of those who have medical insurance have no dental insurance. The following resources could help cover the expense of children's dental care:

- Medi-Cal: (888) 747-1222
- Transitional Medi-Cal: (888) 747-1222
- Healthy Families: (800) 880-5305
- CHDP: <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/chdp/Pages/CountyOffices.aspx>

In addition, community-sponsored programs have programs as well. Some clinics, dental societies, nonprofit organizations, churches, dental schools and private practitioners have services that provide free or lower-cost care to families in need.



California Childcare Health  
Program UCSF School of Nursing  
[cchp.ucsf.edu](http://cchp.ucsf.edu)  
2006