

Cavity Germs

Early childhood cavities, also called baby bottle tooth decay or nursing bottle mouth can destroy the teeth of an infant or child.

The bacteria present in Mom or Dad's mouth that cause cavities (cavity germs) can be passed to baby. If everyone in the family has regular dental care and keeps their mouth clean, then not as many cavity-causing germs are passed to your child. The more unfilled cavities, the more germs.

These germs are passed on to your baby. It is also important not to share cups or spoon, and never put the pacifier or bottle nipples in your mouth before putting it back in your baby's mouth.

Secret Sugars = Acid Attack

A thin, sticky film called plaque covers the teeth every day. The germs in the plaque "eat" the sugar and give off acid, which attacks the teeth. If sugary liquid is allowed to remain in the mouth, acid can attack teeth for 20 minutes and tooth decay can occur.

Among these sugary liquids are Kool-Aid, pop, and sports drinks. Also, natural sugars in milk, and even fruit juice cause decay! Although breast milk has natural sugars in it, you can cut down tooth decay risk if you breastfeed your baby.

Between Meals

It's not just what the children drink, but how often and for how long their teeth get sugar. For example, if you offer a bottle containing sugary liquid as a pacifier many times a day, you get more acid attacks. In the same way, allowing a child to fall asleep with a bottle during a nap, or at bedtime can also harm the teeth. The liquid pools around the teeth like an acid bath.

You can prevent this by watching what you give baby between regular feedings. A bottle should not be used as a pacifier or as a way to get baby to sleep, unless it contains plain water.



Healthy primary (baby) teeth



Mild decay



Moderate decay



Severe decay

It's Never Too Late!

If your child is already used to sleeping with a bottle, try sneaking into the room and removing the bottle after baby has fallen asleep. Or try gradually reducing the amount of sugary liquids a little every night, until you are down to just water. If your doctor does not want the baby to have water, and says that the baby needs the extra feedings at night to grow healthy, try feeding the baby at night in an upright position. Then lay the baby back down after the feeding, without the bottle.



Squeaky Clean - Oral Health Care for Babies

Before feedings, wipe the baby's teeth and gums clean with a clean, damp washcloth or gauze pad. This will remove the germs in the plaque and prevent acid attacks. Once first teeth appear, use a small soft toothbrush, with a smear of fluoride toothpaste (the size of a grain of rice) 2 times a day.

First Visit to the Dentist

It may be difficult to find a dentist that will see your child at this age. If you have a concern or have been told to see a dentist by a teacher, nurse, or doctor, you may explain to the dentist's office that you have a concern and that the American Dental Association has made this recommendation. Ask your dentist if your child is getting enough fluoride.

Baby teeth are very important. Even though they fall out, these teeth hold a space open for the permanent tooth that is about to come in. Also, baby teeth that are badly decayed can cause a lot of pain and infection. No parent wants to see a child suffer. At age one, it's time for your child to see the dentist!

By spending a few minutes each day to care for your child's baby teeth, you can be certain your child's smile will get off to a healthy start for a lifetime!



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Early Childhood Cavities



How to Avoid Baby Bottle Tooth Decay