

Children's Oral Health

10 Questions Every Parent & Caregiver Should Know

1. When should my child first see a dentist?

A dental home should be established no later than 12 months of age. Early visits support prevention, risk assessment, and caregiver guidance.

3. When should I start brushing?

Begin oral hygiene early. Once teeth erupt, brush twice daily with fluoride toothpaste and supervise young children closely.

5. Are fruit juice and sweet drinks harmful?

Frequent exposure to free sugars increases cavity risk. Water is a good everyday beverage choice.

7. What are dental sealants?

Sealants are protective coatings placed on chewing surfaces of certain teeth to help prevent cavities. Ask your child's dental professional whether they are appropriate.

9. What if dental care is difficult to access?

Ask your child's healthcare team, school, public health agency, community health center, or community organization about dental resources and referrals.

2. Do baby teeth really matter?

Yes. Primary teeth help children chew and speak and hold space for permanent teeth. Decay can cause pain and infection.

4. How much fluoride toothpaste should I use?

Under age 3: no more than a smear or rice-sized amount. Ages 3-6: no more than a pea-sized amount.

6. Can a child have a cavity without pain?

Yes. Early decay may cause no obvious symptoms. Preventive dental visits can identify problems before pain develops.

8. What signs need prompt dental attention?

Dental pain, facial or gum swelling, signs of infection, dental injury, or other concerning changes warrant timely professional evaluation.

10. How can schools and communities help?

They can provide age-appropriate education, support healthier food and beverage choices, connect families to care, and strengthen prevention partnerships.

DON'T WAIT FOR PAIN

Cavities can develop before a child complains. **Seek prompt dental care for:** pain, swelling, signs of infection, or dental injury. **Urgent:** severe swelling or difficulty breathing or swallowing requires urgent medical attention.

HHF PRACTICAL TIP

Start early. Brush twice daily. Use the right amount of fluoride toothpaste. Choose water often. Limit frequent sugary drinks and snacks. Keep preventive dental visits - and ask questions.

Learn more: Read the full HHF Connect article, *Children's Oral Health Is a Public Health Issue: Lessons from the Field, Family Practice, and Community Prevention*.

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