

# Early Childhood Cavities

## What Is Early Childhood Cavities?

Early Childhood Cavities (E.C.C.) is tooth decay which affects the teeth of babies and young children.

Tooth decay is caused by plaque. Plaque is an invisible film containing germs and food particles that stick to teeth. Plaque constantly grows in the mouth.

At birth, babies do not have decay-causing germs in their mouths. These germs are passed from parents to babies through kissing and sharing utensils like spoons. The more germs the parents have in their mouths, the more germs will be passed on to the baby. This can increase the **risk** of early childhood cavities.

When sugars and starches are eaten, the germs in plaque make decay-causing acid. This acid causes tooth decay if plaque is not removed every day. Most drinks, except water, contain sugar which changes into acids in the mouth.

## What Does Early Childhood Cavities Look Like?

E.C.C. first appears as chalky white crescent-shaped areas on the tooth by the gumline. If this tooth decay goes unnoticed, teeth begin to turn brown and tooth decay grows quickly. In severe cases, the tops of the teeth can be broken away, leaving brown or black stumps and abscesses (infections).

The top front baby teeth are the most common teeth to decay because they are some of the first teeth to grow in. Baby molars can also decay. Bottom front teeth do not usually decay because the tongue protects these teeth from liquids while the baby sucks.

## What Can Happen To A Child With Early Childhood Cavities?

Decayed baby teeth can cause:

- pain (toothaches) and infection from abscesses.
- poor appetite since chewing can be painful. If healthy foods cannot be chewed the baby may grow more slowly.
- difficulty sleeping because of pain or discomfort.
- fevers due to infections.
- ear infections and/or hearing loss due to sinus blockage.
- poor appearance.
- poor self-esteem.
- speech problems.
- crowded permanent teeth



## How Can Early Childhood Cavities Be Prevented?

Begin daily mouth-cleaning at birth before teeth appear. Wipe the baby's gums, roof of mouth and insides of cheeks with a clean soft damp fabric cloth.

When the first teeth appear, brush them gently with a small, soft bristled toothbrush. A smear of fluoride toothpaste can be used. When children are age 3, a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste can be used. Brushing should be supervised and the toothpaste should be spit out. The use of fluoride helps to make the teeth stronger.

Check your baby's mouth daily. Look for chalky white areas along the gumline, black or brown spots on teeth, or mouth sores. If you see any of these, take your child to a dental professional as soon as possible.



Wipe baby's mouth daily

## More Tips to Prevent Early Childhood Cavities

- Put your baby to bed with a favourite toy. Avoid putting your baby to bed with a bottle containing milk, formula, juice, or any sweet liquid, like iced tea or pop.
- Avoid using the bottle as a pacifier during the day or night. This causes milk to dribble slowly into the baby's mouth over a long period of time and pool. This will cause repeated acid attacks to the teeth and cause tooth decay.

- Never give a baby a soother that has been dipped in sugar, honey or any sweet substance.
- Encourage the baby to use a cup for drinks rather than a bottle when the baby is old enough. This is usually after 6 months of age.
- Limit the number of sweet treats given to infants and toddlers. This includes treats given by parents, grandparents and other caregivers.
- Visits to the dentist should begin at age one. When there are concerns or questions, contact a dental professional **as soon as possible**. This will prevent toothaches, abscesses and costly dental treatment.
- Parents and caregivers need to brush and floss their own teeth every day and visit the dentist regularly so that their mouth will be healthy. This will limit the number of decay-causing germs passed to the baby from the parents or the caregivers mouth.

For more information, call the  
Oral Health Program at  
**(306) 655-4462**

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