

# Early Childhood Tooth Decay

## What is Early Childhood Tooth Decay?

Early Childhood Tooth Decay is tooth decay that affects the teeth of babies and young children.

At birth, babies do not have decay causing germs in their mouths. These germs are passed from parents to their 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. When the baby's mouth and teeth are not cleaned daily, decay causing acids are formed from most liquids that are fed to the baby. These liquids include formula, cow's milk, breast milk and fruit juices. Repeated acid attacks break down the tooth surface and cause decay.

## What Causes Early Childhood Tooth Decay?

A child gets Early Childhood Tooth Decay when:

- The mouth has not been cleaned daily
- A bottle or spill free training cup that is filled with milk, juice or other sweetened liquid remains in bed with the child. This usually results in the child feeding off and on throughout

the night. The liquid pools in the mouth for long periods of time causing repeated acid attacks.

- A child walks around with a bottle or spill-free training cup during the day.
- The bottle, spill-free training cup, or breast is used as a pacifier.

## What Does Early Childhood Tooth Decay Look Like?



Photo courtesy of Battlefords Tribal Council

Early Childhood Tooth Decay first appears as a chalky white crescent-shaped area along the gum line of the front top teeth.

If it goes unnoticed, it will progress to brown areas of decay very quickly.

This can lead to infection (abscess) and broken down teeth that look like stumps.



Photo courtesy of Battlefords Tribal Council

## What Can Happen To A Child With Early Childhood Tooth Decay?

Early Childhood Tooth Decay can cause:

- pain (toothache) and infection abscess.
- poor appetite and painful chewing.
- difficulty sleeping because of pain or discomfort.
- poor appearance.
- speech problems.
- crowded adult teeth.

## Early Childhood Tooth Decay Can be Prevented

### Infant Mouth Cleaning

Daily mouth cleaning should begin soon after birth. Wipe your baby's gums, roof of mouth and inside of cheeks with a clean, soft damp cloth.



Picture courtesy of Stephen J. Moss, DDS, MD.

When teeth first appear, brush them gently with a small soft bristled toothbrush twice a day. The Canadian Dental Association recommends that children under

age 3 who are not at risk for tooth decay should have their teeth brushed by an adult using only a wet toothbrush. Children at risk for tooth decay should have their teeth brushed using fluoridated toothpaste the size of a grain of rice. After age 3, children should be assisted by an adult using a pea sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste. Children should spit out the toothpaste.

## Brushing and Flossing

### How to Brush

Angle the toothbrush bristles towards the gums. Gently brush back and forth with short, vibrating motions on all sides of the teeth.



Outside



Inside

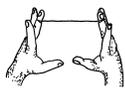


Top of the teeth

Brushing does not clean between the teeth or where the gums and teeth meet. Flossing cleans these areas.

Flossing should be done once a day starting when the teeth grow in and touch together. Your child will accept flossing more easily if it is introduced at an early age.

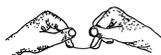
### How to Floss



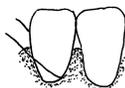
Wrap floss around middle fingers (use about ½ metre or 18 inches).



How to hold floss for top teeth.



How to hold floss for bottom teeth.



Move floss gently between teeth. Curve floss into a “C” shape and move up and down. Move to the next tooth.

## Tips to Prevent Early Childhood Tooth Decay

- Use a favourite toy, hugs, stories or songs to comfort your child instead of comforting them with a bottle, breast, or food.
- Do not put your child to bed with a bottle or spill-free training cup. If you do, make sure it contains only water.
- Lift the lip once a month to look at the teeth and gums and check for early signs of tooth decay.
- Introduce a cup when your child is 6 months of age.
- Limit the amount and frequency of foods and drinks containing sugar that are given to infants and toddlers.

- Choose healthy foods and snacks for your child.
- Do not give a baby a soother dipped in sugar, honey, or any other sweet substance.
- Parents and caregivers need to floss and brush their own teeth every day and visit the dentist regularly. This will limit the number of decay causing bacteria passed to a child from the parent or caregivers’ mouth.

## The First Dental Visit

The Canadian Dental Association recommends your child’s first visit to the dentist should be at age one. Your dentist will check for signs of tooth decay and give you guidance about your child’s oral health.

Your child depends on you for mouth care. Helping your child develop good oral habits and attitudes will result in good oral health for a lifetime.

For more information contact your dental health educator/ coordinator or your local dental team.