Baby Teeth are Important!

Tooth decay (cavities) is a serious problem that can destroy a child’s baby teeth. It is the most common early childhood disease. Tooth decay can start as soon as teeth come into the mouth and may cause pain and infection. It is the main reason young children have surgery. Every child is at risk for tooth decay but it can be prevented.

Children need healthy baby teeth to:
- Chew and eat food
- Grow and develop
- Speak well
- Sleep well
- Smile and feel good about how they look
- Have healthy adult (permanent) teeth

### Use this guide to check the front, back and top of all teeth often when brushing

#### Healthy Baby Teeth
- Teeth are clean and gums are pink.

#### Early Tooth Decay
- White lines on the teeth near the gums could be the start of tooth decay.

#### Tooth Decay
- Tooth decay appears as yellow, brown or black areas.

Children are not healthy when they have tooth decay.

If you think your child has any stage of tooth decay, visit a dental professional immediately.

To find a dentist go to: www.bcdental.org
There are 4 things needed for Tooth Decay: teeth, bacteria (germs), sugar (from food and drinks), and time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Does Tooth Decay Happen?</th>
<th>How Do You Prevent Tooth Decay?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Babies are not born with the bacteria that cause tooth decay. The bacteria can be spread from person to person.</td>
<td>• Everyone in the family needs regular daily mouth care and dental checkups to prevent the spread of the bacteria to baby.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If the teeth are not brushed regularly, the bacteria is left on the teeth too long.</td>
<td>• As soon as teeth come in, brush all tooth surfaces twice a day with a soft toothbrush.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The bacteria use sugars and starches (from food and drinks) to make a mild acid that damages teeth. Over time this damage can become a cavity.</td>
<td>• Brush with a rice grain sized amount of fluoride toothpaste to keep tooth enamel strong and help reverse early tooth decay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• After teeth come into the mouth, regular use of a bottle containing anything other than water at bedtime/during the night may cause tooth decay.</td>
<td>• Start to serve drinks from an open cup by 6 months. After 12 months offer all drinks from a cup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sipping drinks other than water and eating snacks all day long may cause tooth decay.</td>
<td>• Have planned meal and snack times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Limit sticky, sugary foods and sweet drinks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Give water when your child is thirsty between meals and snacks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For a video on how to brush, see <a href="http://www.vch.ca/dental-health-children">www.vch.ca/dental-health-children</a>, 'Tooth Brushing for children three and under - The knee-to-knee technique'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>See VCH Bye Bye Baby Bottle for tips on how to stop the bottle habit after 12 months <a href="http://vch.eduhealth.ca">http://vch.eduhealth.ca</a>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Take your baby to see the dentist by their first birthday.

The dentist will check your child’s teeth, provide support with brushing and apply fluoride varnish to the teeth.

Take good care of your own teeth too!

Do you know about Government dental insurance for children?

Children in families who get income assistance or MSP Premium Assistance are eligible for basic dental care through the BC Healthy Kids Program. For more info call 1-866-866-0800 or visit: [www.sdsi.gov.bc.ca/publicat/bcea/HealthyKids.htm](http://www.sdsi.gov.bc.ca/publicat/bcea/HealthyKids.htm).

For more information:
- HealthLink BC - Dial 8-1-1. Translation services are available in 130 languages. [www.healthlinkbc.ca](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca)
- or the Public Health Dental Program or a Public Health Nurse at Vancouver Coastal Health. [www.vch.ca](http://www.vch.ca)
- VCH Parenting Website - [http://parenting.vch.ca/](http://parenting.vch.ca/)

Other fact sheets on parenting your child are available at your local Community Health Office/Centre or online at [http://vch.eduhealth.ca](http://vch.eduhealth.ca)

© Vancouver Coastal Health, September 2016

The information in this document is intended solely for the person to whom it was given by the health care team. [www.vch.ca](http://www.vch.ca)