



## Children's Dental Health

**February is National Children's Dental Health Month. Cavities, also known as caries or tooth decay, are the most common chronic disease of childhood, yet cavities are preventable. Children who have poor oral health often [miss more school and receive lower grades than children who don't](#). Learn how you can protect your child's teeth from cavities with these resources.**



Untreated cavities can cause pain, infections, and can lead to problems eating, speaking, and learning. More than 1 in 5 children aged 2 to 5 years has at least one cavity in their baby teeth. Children from low-income families are more than twice as likely to have untreated cavities, compared with children from higher-income households. However, cavities are preventable. You can [protect and maintain your child's teeth](#) by following these wise simple steps below:

### **P-E-A-R-L-S of Wisdom**

**Protect** tiny teeth by caring for your mouth when you're pregnant. Your child's future oral health starts with you.

**Ensure** to wipe your baby's gums after each meal.

**Avoid** putting babies to bed with a bottle.

**Remember** to brush your child's teeth twice daily with fluoride toothpaste. For children younger than 2 years, consult with your dentist or doctor about when to start using fluoride toothpaste.

**Limit** drinks and food with added sugars for children. Encourage your child to eat more fruits and vegetables and have fewer fruit drinks, cookies, and candies. This gives your child the best possible start to good oral health.

**Schedule** your child's first dental visit by their first birthday or after their first tooth appears. Their tiny teeth matter!

### **Root of It All: Are You Watching What Your Child Eats and Drinks?**

Your child's diet is very important for developing and maintaining strong and healthy teeth. It is helpful to include good sources of calcium (yogurt, broccoli, and milk) to your child's diet to help build strong teeth. Teaching your child about healthy eating habits is one of the best practices for a lifetime of good health. Here are some helpful tips:



- Eat fruits and vegetables for snacks rather than candies and cookies.
- Brush your child's teeth twice daily.
- Serve water at mealtime rather than juice or soda.

## Did You Know That Community Water Fluoridation Saves Money and Teeth?

Fluoride is a naturally occurring element in water. [Community water fluoridation](#) is the process of adjusting the amount of fluoride found in water to achieve the best prevention of tooth decay.

- Bacteria in the mouth produce acid when a person eats sugary foods. This acid eats away minerals from the tooth's surface, making the tooth weaker and increasing the chance of developing cavities.
- Drinking tap water with fluoride rebuilds the surface of the tooth. By keeping the tooth strong and solid, fluoride protects teeth from decay.
- Community water fluoridation has been shown to save money, both for families and the health care system.
- Check if your water has fluoride by visiting [My Water's Fluoride](#).

## School Dental Sealant Programs: A Hidden Gem

[Dental sealants](#) are a quick, easy, and painless way to prevent most cavities children get in the permanent back teeth where 9 in 10 cavities occur. Children aged 6 to 11 years without sealants have almost 3 times more first-molar cavities than children with sealants.

School dental sealant programs are an effective way to deliver this highly effective preventive intervention to millions of children who might not receive regular dental care. Increasing sealant use among low-income children can greatly reduce tooth decay.

As a parent, ask your child's dentist to apply sealants when appropriate. If your child's school has a sealant program, sign your child up to participate. If they don't, ask your child's school to start one.

## More Information

- Learn more about [dental sealant use and untreated tooth decay among US school-aged children](#).
- Find more information about [food and drinks for 6- to 24-month-old children](#).
- Learn what you should know about [children's oral health](#).
- Find more information on [dental sealants](#).
- [Protect tiny teeth](#) to give your child the best possible start to a lifetime of healthy teeth. Learn more about the Oral Health Toolkit and download posters for the office, infographics, videos, and a Q&A handout about oral health during pregnancy and for infants.
- If you need help finding a pediatric dentist, visit [www.insurekidsnow.gov](http://www.insurekidsnow.gov)

Last Reviewed: January 30, 2023

Source: [Division of Oral Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion](#)