

Parent Guide to Children's Dental Care



Blue Cross
DentalSM



At Blue Cross Dental, we believe the best way to stay healthy is to prevent problems before they start. Here are some tips to keep your child's teeth healthy and trouble free, from birth through young adulthood.

This guide provides you with helpful information about basic dental care and oral health issues that are common among children. Please keep in mind, however, that these guidelines are not meant as a substitute for regular professional dental or medical care.



Basic Dental Care

An Ounce of Prevention

Brushing and flossing are two of your child's best weapons against tooth decay. Dentists recommend brushing at least twice a day and flossing once daily. Here are some tips to help your child prevent problems.

- **Use a children's toothbrush.** Children's toothbrushes are specially designed with kids' needs in mind. They have small, soft bristles that allow kids to reach all their teeth and handles that are easy to grip.
- **Use a small amount of toothpaste.** Most young children swallow some or all of the toothpaste they use. Because ingesting too much toothpaste can be harmful, it's best if you put the toothpaste on the toothbrush until your child is old enough to spit all of it out. Use a dollop approximately half the size of a pea. Use a wet toothbrush with no toothpaste for children under two years old.
- **Kids should floss, too.** Dental floss is the best way to clean between the teeth. Children should floss once a day as soon as two of their baby teeth



floss for touch. Young children do not have the dexterity to do it themselves, so parents need to floss for them. If you have trouble reaching your child's rear teeth, you can use a floss stick.

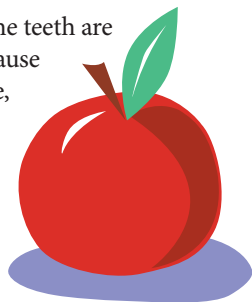
- **Visit your dentist every six months.**

Kids should go to the dentist for cleanings twice a year. Your dentist can remove plaque buildup and can spot minor problems before they become major ones.

An Apple a Day

A balanced diet is essential for overall good health, and that includes the health of your teeth. It's well-known that sugar can lead to cavities. And sugar is present in more foods than many people realize, such as fruits, juices, and breads.

Foods that stick to the teeth are also more likely to cause cavities. For example, chewy candy, dried fruit, and bananas tend to coat the teeth and remain in contact longer than something that is washed away easily, such as an apple. Even though the apple is sweet, it is less likely to cause cavities.



Just because a food is sticky or contains sugar doesn't mean you shouldn't give it to your child. Fruit, bread, peanut butter, and many other foods have excellent health benefits. However, dentists recommend that you reserve sugary and sticky foods for mealtimes when they'll be washed away by other foods and drinks. For snacks, choose foods that wash away easily on their own, and limit the number of times your child has snacks during the day.

Emergency Care

Children are active and more prone to accidents that may require emergency care. Generally, dental emergencies fall into two categories: toothaches and tooth injuries.

- **Toothache:** Have your child rinse his mouth with warm water. Make sure there is no food caught between the teeth that may be causing the pain. You can give your child a cold compress or ice wrapped in a towel to hold against the affected area. Do not use heat,

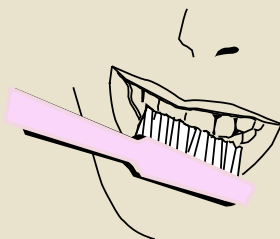
and do not apply aspirin directly to the tooth or gum. Call your dentist as soon as possible.

- **Tooth injury:** If your child has a permanent tooth chipped or knocked out, call your dentist immediately. Save the tooth and rinse it gently with water. Do not scrub it or try to remove any tissue still clinging to it. If possible, hold the tooth in its original position in your child's mouth, or place it in a clean cup of milk and bring it to your dentist.

A **mouth guard** can help protect your child during any activity that carries the risk of falling, such as football, soccer, skateboarding, biking, or gymnastics. A custom-made mouth guard from your dentist will fit the best and be most comfortable, but less expensive versions are available from sporting goods stores.

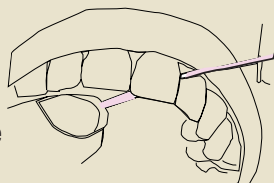
Six Tips For Brushing

- Hold the brush at a 45 degree angle to your teeth.
- Move the brush back and forth in short strokes over 2-3 teeth at a time.
- Be gentle! Plaque comes off with light pressure. Scrubbing may hurt your gums.
- Brush the insides, outsides, and tops (chewing surfaces) of your teeth.
- Don't forget to brush behind your front teeth.
- Brush your tongue, too—it helps prevent bad breath.



Six Tips for Flossing

- Use about 18 inches of floss.
- Wind it around the middle finger of each hand.
- Use your thumbs and index fingers to guide the floss between your teeth.
- Gently work the floss between each tooth. Don't snap it in!
- Curve the floss around each tooth and slide it between the tooth and the gum, rubbing gently.
- Don't forget the back of your last tooth



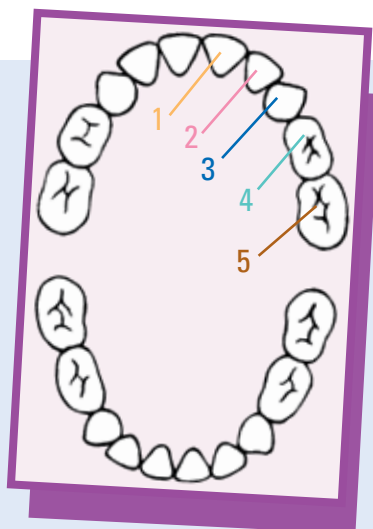
Infants

Infant Oral Hygiene

Even though your newborn doesn't have teeth yet, it's still important to keep her mouth clean. After each feeding, wipe her gums gently with a clean, damp cloth or gauze pad.

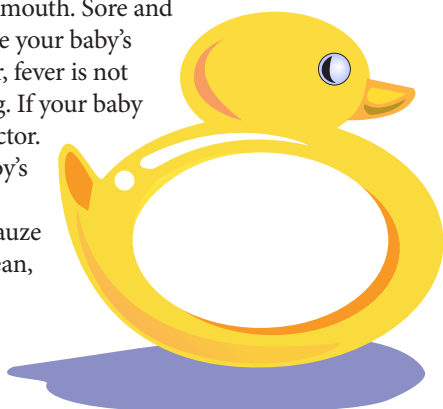
Teething

The chart below provides you with a general idea of when your child's baby teeth will come in and fall out.



	IN	OUT
1 Central Incisor	Upper: 8-12 mos. Lower: 6-10 mos.	6-7 yrs. 6-7 yrs.
2 Lateral Incisor	Upper: 9-13 mos. Lower: 10-16 mos.	7-8 yrs. 7-8 yrs.
3 Canine	Upper: 16-22 mos. Lower: 17-23 mos.	10-12 yrs. 9-12 yrs.
4 First Molar	Upper: 13-19 mos. Lower: 14-18 mos.	9-11 yrs. 9-11 yrs.
5 Second Molar	Upper: 25-33 mos. Lower: 25-31 mos.	10-12 yrs. 10-12 yrs.

Signs of teething may be fussiness, drooling, or the urge to put objects in the mouth. Sore and tender gums are normal while your baby's teeth are coming in. However, fever is not a typical symptom of teething. If your baby develops a fever, call your doctor. You can help soothe your baby's sore gums by gently rubbing them with a clean finger or gauze pad, or giving your baby a clean, cool teething ring to chew.



What is “Baby Bottle Syndrome?”

Baby bottle syndrome occurs when children frequently drink liquids that contain sugar, such as milk or fruit juice, especially before falling asleep. The constant exposure to sugar can cause tooth decay.

To prevent baby bottle syndrome:

- Clean your baby’s teeth and gums after each feeding with a damp cloth or gauze pad.
- Never put your child to bed with anything other than plain water in his bottle.
- Encourage your baby to drink from a cup by his first birthday.

Caring for New Teeth

You should begin cleaning your baby’s teeth as soon as they break through the gums. At first, brush the tooth gently with a small, soft toothbrush, preferably one that is made specifically for infants. Do not use toothpaste until your child is two years old; instead, use water. Begin flossing your baby’s teeth as soon as two of her teeth touch.

Thumb Sucking

Sucking is a normal reflex for children. Thumb sucking (or the use of a pacifier) is generally not harmful for babies and young children.

Sucking can become a problem, however, if a child continues the habit as the permanent teeth start to come in. If your child continues to suck his thumb or finger or use a pacifier after about age four, your dentist may have suggestions to help him stop.

Baby’s First Visit to the Dentist

Dentists recommend that you bring your baby to the dentist by her first birthday or within six months after her first tooth comes in, whichever comes first. Reading books about visiting the dentist can help your child know what to expect at the dentist’s office and may ease anxiety.

Recommended reading to ease your child’s fears

The Berenstain Bears Visit the Dentist

Stan Berenstain, Jan Berenstain

Barney Goes to the Dentist

Linda Cress Dowdy, Dennis Full

Just Going to the Dentist

Mercer Mayer

Freddie Visits the Dentist

Nicola Smee

What to Expect When You Go to the Dentist

Heidi Murkoff, Laura Rader



Young Children



The Invisible Cavity Fighter

Researchers have found that fluoride plays an important role in preventing tooth decay. It aids in the development of healthy enamel (the outer layer of the tooth) when children are very young. It also prevents cavity-causing plaque acids from developing on a tooth's surface and can even help repair minor damage from plaque.

- **Fluoride in your water:** Most public water supplies in Rhode Island are fluoridated (i.e., fluoride is added to the water to reach the recommended level.) Your local water supply board can tell you if your town's water is fluoridated. If you have well water, you can have a sample tested to find out whether fluoride is present naturally. Contact your local water supply board for information on how to get your water tested.
- **Fluoride supplements:** If your water does not contain enough fluoride, your dentist can prescribe dietary supplements for your child.
- **Fluoride in your toothpaste:** Make sure your family uses fluoride toothpaste. If necessary, your dentist can also give your child fluoride treatments during an office visit.



Are Baby Teeth Important?

Baby teeth are not only important to help your child speak and chew properly, they also help guide the permanent teeth to grow in properly. Of course, it's natural for baby teeth to fall out when the permanent teeth grow in. However, if your child loses a baby tooth early due to decay or injury, it's important to consult your dentist about whether treatment is necessary. If a baby tooth is lost too soon, the surrounding teeth can shift and permanent teeth may grow improperly. Sometimes, an appliance to maintain the space may be necessary if a baby tooth is lost too soon.

What are Space Maintainers?

Space maintainers fill the gap when a baby tooth is lost too early due to decay or injury, and can help keep the surrounding teeth from shifting until the permanent tooth grows in. A space maintainer is a small dental appliance, usually made of plastic or metal, that your dentist will custom-fit for your child's mouth. Used early on, a space maintainer may help prevent the need for more extensive orthodontic treatment later.



Twice is right

Make sure you see your dentist twice a year. There simply is no better way to keep minor problems from becoming major ones than to schedule regular checkups with your dentist.

During your visit, you will get a professional cleaning to remove plaque buildup. Your dentist may also give you a thorough dental examination and take X-rays.



Older Children and Teens

Orthodontics

Sometimes, no matter how carefully children protect and care for their teeth, they still develop orthodontic problems, known as malocclusions. These problems may include crooked or crowded teeth,



an underbite or overbite, extra teeth, or other problems with the teeth and jaw. To correct these problems, your dentist may recommend that you visit an orthodontist.

When should your child visit an orthodontist?

Since all children develop differently, your dentist will evaluate your child's particular situation and let you know if and when you should see an orthodontist. Treatment can be successful for both children and adults, although in general it takes longer for adults.

How are problems treated?

A variety of orthodontic appliances are used in treatment. Some common examples are braces and retainers. Your orthodontist will assess your child's specific situation and recommend the appropriate orthodontic appliance for treatment. He or she will custom fit the appliance to your child's mouth.

Words of Wisdom

Wisdom teeth are well-known for causing problems, and many teens and young adults expect to have them removed. But is removal always necessary? When can wisdom teeth be left alone? If wisdom

teeth (also known as "third molars") grow in properly and do not crowd other teeth, there is generally no need to remove them. However, as is often the case, they may grow in crooked or sideways, may not grow in all the way, or may become "impacted," or trapped beneath the gum. If there is not enough room for the wisdom teeth, whether they emerge or not, other teeth may be negatively affected.

Possible complications from wisdom teeth that have not grown in properly include pain and infection from bacteria that are trapped around partially-erupted teeth; damage to other teeth from overcrowding; and cysts beneath the gum caused by wisdom teeth that are unable to erupt.

Your dentist will examine your child's wisdom teeth and may take X-rays to analyze the situation. He or she may see a clear need for removal, or may feel that the wisdom teeth can stay if they are monitored periodically. Your child's dentist may recommend that you see an oral surgeon for further evaluation.

Oral Piercing

Oral piercing has grown in popularity as a form of self-expression among teens. Unfortunately, young people may not be aware of the many risks associated with oral piercing. Complications from tongue, lip, and cheek piercing include:

- Injuries to the gums or damage to the teeth due to jewelry rubbing or hitting these areas
- Prolonged bleeding and serious blood loss from damaged blood vessels in the tongue

- Swelling of the tongue—sometimes serious enough to obstruct airways
- Transmission of blood-borne diseases, including hepatitis B, C, D, and G
- Infection at the piercing site, which can enter the bloodstream and lead to endocarditis, or infection of the heart tissues
- Excessive saliva production
- Interference with normal speech, chewing, and swallowing

Smoking and Chewing Tobacco

It is well-known that the use of tobacco products (both smoking and chewing tobacco) can lead to serious diseases such as lung cancer, heart disease, and stroke. It can also cause a host of other problems that affect oral health, such as the following:

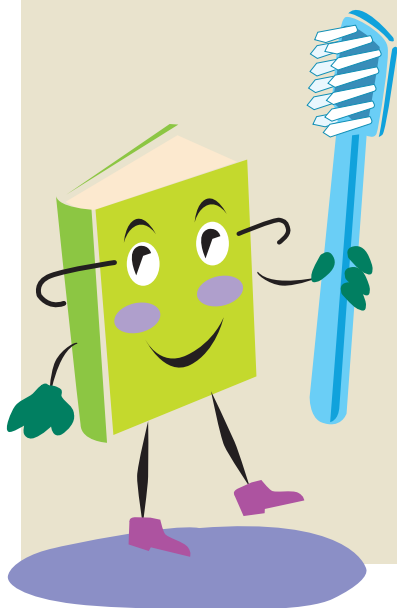
- Oral cancer
- Tooth decay
- Tooth loss
- Throat cancer
- Periodontal disease
- Stained teeth
- Receding gums

Tobacco is a health hazard on many levels. It's important to talk to your child early about all the risks, and prevent the problem before it starts.

Internet Resources

American Dental Association:
www.ada.org

American Academy of Pediatric
Dentistry: www.aapd.org



Your Child's Dental History

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Brighten Your Smile With Blue Cross Dental

Blue Cross Dental is the perfect partner to ensure your oral health. Our group dental plans are designed to fit your needs. We have a national Coast-to-Coast network featuring more than 65,000 points of access, and we provide quick and accurate claims processing. Speak to your employer today, and see how Blue Cross Dental gives you more reasons to smile. You can find out about individual dental coverage at **BCBSRI.com**.

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