



EARLY CHILDHOOD CARIES (BABY BOTTLE TOOTH DECAY)

What is baby bottle tooth decay?

When an infant or small child develops several cavities, usually on the top front teeth, it is called baby bottle tooth decay. These cavities may look like white lines or spots early on, and may progress in appearance to dark pits, holes, or broken teeth. Cavities may cause toothaches and make it hard for the child to eat.

What causes baby bottle tooth decay?

It happens when liquids that contain sugar are left in a baby's mouth for long or frequent periods of time. Even breast milk and formula contain sugar.¹



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Are baby teeth important?

Baby teeth are important for chewing food and speaking properly. They also aid in the development of facial structures and promote confidence and self-esteem. If baby teeth are lost too early, the permanent teeth can come in crowded or out of line. All children should see a dentist by their first birthday to ensure the child's best future dental health.¹

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How can you protect your child's teeth?

- Lift the lip once a month to check for early cavities. Look closely along the gum line for white lines or brown spots on the front or back of teeth.
- Take your child to the dentist by his or her first birthday.
- Wipe your child's mouth, gums, and teeth after every feeding (including after breastfeeding or bottles) and at bedtime with a soft, wet cloth.
- Once your child gets teeth, brush them with an infant toothbrush with a smear of fluoride toothpaste (no bigger than a grain of rice).
- Put your child to bed without a bottle. If your child must have a bottle to sleep, fill it with plain water. You may need to mix the drink in the bottle with water. Add a little more water each night, until your child is drinking plain water.
- Encourage your child to start drinking from a cup at six months and wean your child off the bottle by one year of age.

What should be avoided?

- Never put a child to bed with a bottle of milk, formula, juice, or a sweet drink.
- Do not put your child to sleep at night at the breast.
- Do not allow a child to drink from a bottle throughout the day.
- Do not allow pacifiers dipped in honey, syrup, or anything sweet, such as Jello™ water, soda, fruit juice, Kool-Aid™, sugar water, milk, or formula.¹
- Never share eating utensils, cups, or toothbrushes. Germs that cause cavities spread from person to person.

For more information contact the Division of Public Health, Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Services, at 302-744-4554 and www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsm/ohphome.html.

Resources

1. American Dental Association. 2014. *Baby Bottle Tooth Decay*. In Mouth Healthy. Retrieved February 11, 2015 from: <http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/b/baby-bottle-tooth-decay>
2. Baby Bottle Tooth Decay. [Illustration of Infant with Bottle and Baby Bottle Tooth Decay]. Retrieved February 16, 2015 from: <http://www.webmd.com/parenting/baby/baby-bottle-tooth-decay>

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