



## **EARLY CHILDHOOD CARIES (BABY BOTTLE TOOTH DECAY)**

Even though they are temporary, your child's baby teeth are important and can still get cavities. Children need strong, healthy teeth to chew their food, speak, and have a pleasant smile, which leads to confidence. Their [first teeth](#) also help make sure their adult teeth come in correctly. It is important to start infants off with good oral care to help protect their teeth for decades to come.

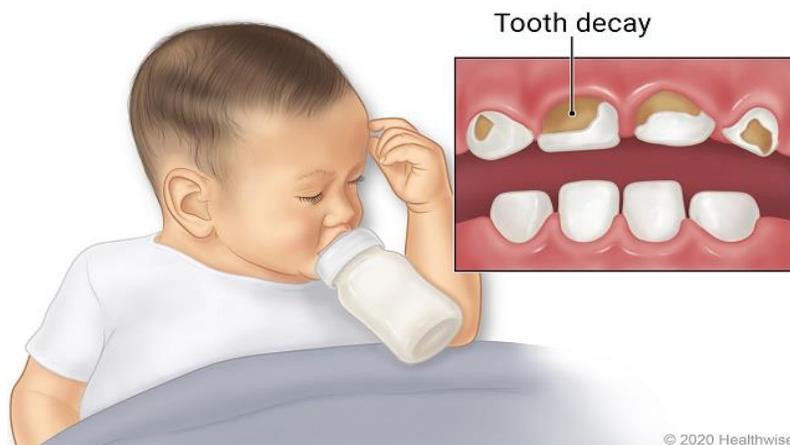
Tooth decay in infants and toddlers is often referred to as Baby Bottle Tooth Decay, or Early Childhood Caries. Baby Bottle Tooth Decay is a preventable disease that most often occurs in the upper front teeth, although other teeth may also be affected.

### **What causes Baby Bottle Tooth Decay?**

There are many factors which can cause tooth decay. One common cause is frequent, prolonged exposure of the baby's teeth to drinks that contain sugar. Tooth decay can occur when the baby is put to bed with a bottle, or when a bottle is used as a pacifier for a fussy baby. Infants and toddlers who do not receive an adequate amount of fluoride may be at an increased risk for tooth decay.

Baby Bottle Tooth Decay can begin when cavity-causing bacteria passes from a parent's (or primary caregiver's) saliva to the infant, such as by sharing spoons or licking pacifiers. The baby should only use their own feeding spoon or pacifier. [Learn how](#) to properly clean, sanitize, and store infant feeding items.

To further protect baby's teeth, schedule the first dental visit when the child's first tooth appears. Remember: starting early is the key to a lifetime of good dental health!<sup>1</sup> The first dental visit is as important as a well-baby visit with the child's pediatrician.



**24/7 Emergency Contact Number: 1-888-295-5156**

Revised: 07/2020

Page 1 of 3



## Preventing Baby Bottle Tooth Decay

- Breastfed or bottle-fed babies can get cavities because both contain sugar. It's important to care for your baby's teeth from the start. A few days after birth, begin wiping your baby's gums with a clean, moist gauze pad or washcloth every day after each feeding. When the first tooth emerges, brush the infant's teeth twice a day, especially before bed.
- Do not share saliva with the baby, such as using the same feeding spoons or licking pacifiers.
- Only use children's toothpaste that contains fluoride because it prevents cavities.
- When your child's teeth come in, brush them gently with a child-size toothbrush and a smear (as big as a grain of rice) of fluoride toothpaste until the age of 3.
- Brush teeth with a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste from the ages of 3 to 6.
- Supervise brushing until your child can be counted on to spit and not swallow toothpaste – usually not before he or she is 6 or 7.
- Place only formula, milk, or breast milk in bottles. Avoid filling the bottle with liquids such as sugar water, juice, or soft drinks. Bottles should be cleaned immediately after every feeding to prevent a build-up of germs and bacteria. Learn about how to clean, sanitize, and store infant feeding items [here](#).
- Infants should finish their bedtime and nap time bottles before going to bed. Never let a child fall asleep with a bottle.
- If your child uses a pacifier, provide one that is clean. Do not dip it in sugar or honey.
- Encourage your child to drink from a cup by his/her first birthday. For more on transitioning successfully and choosing the right cup, visit [MouthHealthy.org's website on training cups](#).
- Encourage healthy eating habits. Click [here](#) to read about infant and toddler nutrition.

## For more information

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](http://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsm/ohphome.html).

**24/7 Emergency Contact Number: 1-888-295-5156**

Revised: 07/2020

Page 2 of 3



## Resources

1. American Dental Association. 2020. *Baby Bottle Tooth Decay*. In Mouth Healthy. Retrieved July 16, 2020 from <http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/b/baby-bottle-tooth-decay>
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *How to Clean, Sanitize, and Store Infant Cleaning Items*. In Water, Sanitation, and Environmentally-related Hygiene. Retrieved November 2, 2020 from <https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/healthychildcare/infantfeeding/cleansanitize.html>