



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON  
Health

# Brush Up on Oral Health

January 2014

Did You Know?

- **Oral Injuries**
  - **Causes and Types of Oral Injuries**
  - **Impact of Oral Injuries**
  - **Preventing Oral Injuries: What Head Start Staff and Parents Can Do**
  - **Cook's Corner: Confetti Dip**
- 18 percent of all injuries in young children involve dental trauma.
  - One quarter of all oral injuries in children under age 18 occur among 1- to 2-year-olds.
  - 33 percent of all 5-year-olds have injured their primary teeth.



## Oral Injuries

Injuries to the head, face, and mouth happen often among young children. Because oral injuries can affect children for the rest of their lives, it is important for Head Start staff and parents to try to prevent these injuries.

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* discusses oral injuries that can happen to children. It also identifies strategies Head Start staff and parents can use to help prevent these injuries.

## Causes and Types of Oral Injuries

Most oral injuries happen when children fall. Children may stumble as they are learning to walk and being physically active. Injuries tend to happen when children trip on things, are pushed by another child, climb on stairs and furniture, or run with items in their mouths. Some children receive burns from chewing on electrical cords that are plugged into a socket. Abuse and neglect can also cause oral injuries. This topic will be addressed in a future news-letter issue.

Children's top front teeth are injured most often. They can be chipped, pushed into the gum, pushed forward or back in the mouth, or knocked out. Bruises or cuts in or near the mouth are also common oral injuries.

## Impact of Oral Injuries

Preventing oral injuries is important for many reasons. Injured primary teeth can turn brown or black, be painful, become infected, or have to be removed. Primary teeth also keep space for permanent teeth and help guide them into position. When primary teeth are lost too early, there may not be enough space for permanent teeth. Injuries to a child's primary teeth can also damage the permanent teeth that are forming under the primary teeth. If a primary tooth is pushed into the gum, it can disturb the cells that are building the permanent tooth. This can cause discolored or deformed permanent teeth or permanent teeth that decay quickly. Injuries to primary and permanent teeth can affect a child's speech, nutrition, self-esteem, and overall health.

## Preventing Oral Injuries: What Head Start Staff and Parents Can Do

Head Start staff and parents can protect children from oral injuries by making home, play, and work areas safe and by practicing safe habits. Here are some steps to take to help prevent oral injuries in Head Start programs and in homes.

- **Do health and safety sweeps.** Tour homes and areas where children play and work. Use safety gates, and cover sharp corners on furniture. Make sure that toys and other things are regularly picked up off the floor to help prevent children from tripping. Check that there is enough uncluttered space for children to move and play, to minimize bumping and pushing. Look over playground equipment to make sure it's age-appropriate. Remove hazards or obstacles that might make a child fall.
- **Set and enforce policies and procedures.** Work with health advisory committee members, parent committees, home visitors, child-safety experts, and others to identify behaviors that could cause oral injuries, and develop policies and procedures to help prevent oral injuries. Some examples include using child safety straps on high chairs; having children wear helmets when riding wheeled toys; and keeping toys picked up from the floor, playground, and yard. The policies and procedures should also address how to handle oral injuries (see [Dental Emergencies: Protect Your Child's Smile](#)).
- **Record, track, and analyze oral injuries.** Head Start staff should document all injuries and inform parents if their child is injured (see [Reviewing Injury Logs](#)). Keep a log of all injuries, and review the log quarterly to identify patterns where and when injuries happen. This information can be used to determine what changes are needed to help prevent injuries.
- **Educate staff, parents, and children.** Use staff training and coaching opportunities, parent meetings, newsletters, and social media to teach Head Start staff, parents, and children how to avoid oral injuries. Invite oral health providers, safety experts, and others to talk about how to prevent injuries.



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## Cook's Corner: Confetti Dip

Here's a delicious healthy snack that children can make as a class project or at home with their families.

### Ingredients

½ cup shredded carrots

½ cup shredded cucumber

½ cup Greek yogurt

¼ teaspoon garlic, chopped fine

⅛ teaspoon salt

1 carrot, celery, bell pepper, or other vegetable sliced into thin pieces



### Directions

1. Place carrots and cucumber, yogurt, garlic, and salt in a bowl and mix well with a fork.
2. Serve dip with vegetables.

**Safety tips:** An adult should slice the ingredients. For children under age 3, avoid foods that may cause choking (for example, raw carrots). For children ages 3 to 5, modify these foods (for example, chopping raw carrots into thin strips).

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Read all issues of *Brush Up on Oral Health* at [Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center](#).

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