

ORAL HEALTH

Tips for Health Managers from the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness

How Can You Promote Good Oral Health?

- Help parents and caregivers learn how to ensure good oral health for children and themselves.
- Help pregnant women and children learn good mouth and teeth habits.

Oral Health Plays a Key Role in the Health of Children

- Good oral health means better growth and development.
- Poor oral health can lead to eating and speaking problems.
- Pain and not wanting to eat because of tooth decay can lead to poor food choices and delayed development.
- Oral pain can make children fussy or withdrawn.
- Oral pain can make it hard to focus and learn.
- Oral pain can mean more missed days of school.
- Children who do not have oral pain learn more.

Oral Health Plays a Key Role in the Health of Pregnant Women

- Pain, shame, and not wanting to eat because of tooth decay can lead to poor food choices.
- Oral pain can make it hard to focus.
- Stained, broken, or missing teeth can make women feel bad about how they look.
- Good oral health during pregnancy means a good start for future oral health.



10 things you should know

- 1** Tooth decay is preventable. Tooth decay occurs when bacteria on teeth consume sugar to produce an acid that breaks down tooth mineral (demineralization). Fluoride use, good eating and feeding habits, good oral health habits, and regular dental visits work together to help prevent tooth decay.
- 2** Tooth decay is the most common disease in children. It is more common in children than obesity and asthma.
- 3** Head Start children, like many children from families with low incomes, have more tooth decay and oral pain than children from families with higher incomes.
- 4** The bacteria that can cause tooth decay can be passed from person to person in many ways:
 - When a parent or caregiver puts a child's pacifier in her mouth to clean it
 - When a parent or caregiver shares food, spoons, or forks with a child
 - When a child puts her hand in a parent's or caregiver's mouth
- 5** Eating and feeding habits play a key role in the cause of tooth decay.
 - Each time a food or drink is consumed, the teeth are exposed to acid for about 20 to 40 minutes.
 - If a child eats foods and drinks all day long, teeth will have acids on them for long periods, increasing the child's risk for tooth decay.
- 6** Fluoride prevents tooth decay.
 - The amount of fluoride toothpaste that should be put onto a child's toothbrush is a smear for infants and children under age 3 years and a pea-size amount for children ages 3 to 6.
 - Children should not rinse after brushing their teeth so that the small amount of fluoride in the toothpaste remaining in their mouth has more time to strengthen the outer layers of the teeth.
 - Parents or caregivers should brush child's teeth or help the child brush. Young children will want to brush their own teeth, but they need help until their hand coordination is better. Brush children's teeth or help children brush their teeth until they are about age 7 to 8 years.

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- 7 Parents or caregivers should clean their infant's teeth and gums regularly with a clean damp washcloth or a toothbrush with soft bristles and a small head made for infants. Infants should have their first dental visit by age 1 year.
- 8 It is safe for pregnant women to get oral health care.
- 9 If not treated, pregnancy gingivitis (gums that are sore, puffy, red, and bleed easily) can lead to periodontal (gum) disease and tooth loss. It is important for pregnant women to brush their teeth at least twice a day and floss once a day before bedtime to keep their teeth and gums healthy.
- 10 During pregnancy, women should eat healthy foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole-grain products, low-fat dairy products, lean meats, poultry, eggs, beans, and nuts. If they eat foods high in sugar, they should do so at mealtimes only.

Key Resources for Head Start Managers

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