



Family Well-Being: Oral Health Tip Sheet

For Early Head Start/Head Start (EHS/HS); Refugee Resettlement; Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS); Early Care and Education Providers

All providers can support families to work with their children in developing good oral health practices. Good oral health habits and regular dental visits help to prevent tooth decay. This Oral Health Tip Sheet corresponds to page 4 of the [Raising Young Children in a New Country: Supporting Early Learning and Healthy Development Handbook](#).

Conversation Starters: (or staff, families, and partners can design program-specific questions)

- How are oral hygiene practices in the U.S. similar to and different from those in your home country?
- What are some ways you teach your children to take care of their teeth and gums?
- What oral health information and tips do you want to learn more about?



Cultural Considerations:

- Refugee families may have had little prior exposure to oral health care. Dentists may have only been visited for serious conditions (e.g., removing teeth), so they may be associated with pain.
- Some refugees use chew sticks to clean their teeth and may not be familiar with toothbrushes used in the U.S.
- Some families may have more oral health problems in the U.S. (e.g., increase of sugar in the U.S. diet; continuing to drink unflouridated bottled water) even if they now have access to regular dental care.
- Some cultures may have traditional practices that affect oral health care, such as chewing betel nut (refugees from Burma and other parts of South Asia and the Pacific) or the removal of certain teeth for beautification or a rite of passage (some groups from Southern Sudan or Kenya).



Remember to Mention:

- Tooth decay is the primary chronic health issue affecting children in the U.S. Sugary drinks and candy may cause tooth decay.
- Germs that cause tooth decay can pass from an adult's to a child's mouth. It is best to rinse a child's pacifier with water instead of cleaning it in an adult's mouth. Use a clean spoon or fork if an adult wants to taste his or her child's food.
- Avoid putting babies to bed with a bottle. The sugar in the drink stays on the baby's teeth and can cause tooth decay.
- Nutritious foods and limited snacking promote good oral health. Eating frequently increases acids that can remove minerals from the teeth, causing tooth decay.
- Primary (baby) teeth are important because they help children chew food easily, speak clearly, and focus on learning.
- Children should not rinse the toothpaste out of their mouths after brushing. This allows the fluoride more time to soak into the teeth.

