



A Baby's Oral Health Care Should Begin at Birth

Most Illinois caregivers don't realize that cavities are nearly 100 percent preventable, according to a survey by Delta Dental of Illinois.¹ Tooth decay can develop any time after teeth erupt in the mouth, starting around 6 months of age.

"Babies are born with a healthy mouth and teeth. So from birth, it's important to establish good oral health habits to keep away cavity-causing bacteria," said Dr. Katina Morelli, DDS, dental director for Delta Dental of Illinois. "If a child has healthy baby teeth, chances are he or she will have healthy adult teeth, too."

Before the first tooth erupts, dentists recommend that caregivers wipe their baby's gums with a damp washcloth or soft infant toothbrush after meals. Cleaning the baby's gums will help keep bacteria levels low and maintain a clean home for his or her new teeth.

According to the survey, almost three-quarters of Illinois caregivers (72 percent) knew it was correct to clean a baby's gums with a soft cloth before the teeth surface, but 34 percent reported only cleaning their baby's gums a few times a week or less.

Nearly a quarter of caregivers (23 percent) with a child 4 years old or younger report that he or she goes to bed at least a few times a week with a bottle or sippy cup containing milk or juice. "Caregivers should not put a child to bed with milk, juice, sweetened water or soft drinks," Morelli said. "The frequent exposure to sugar can lead to severe tooth decay – often called baby bottle decay. Instead, caregivers should fill the bottle with water. Infants and very young children have more of a desire to suck than to have sweet liquids."

Here are some additional steps you can take to ensure your little one has a healthy smile through childhood and into adulthood.

- Avoid sharing toothbrushes, bottles, spoons and straws to protect your baby from the transfer of cavity-causing bacteria.
- As soon as the first tooth erupts, begin brushing with a small, soft-bristled toothbrush and a smear of fluoride toothpaste at least once a day, preferably before bedtime. Once any two of your child's teeth are touching, it's time to start flossing once a day.
- Within six months of getting the first tooth – and no later than the first birthday – your baby should have his or her first dental visit.
- By the time your child is 2, or by the time he or she can spit, start using a pea-sized dab of fluoride toothpaste. Be sure to train your child to spit out the toothpaste and rinse afterward. Help your child brush properly twice a day.

- You should help brush and floss, or at a minimum supervise, until age 7 or 8 or until your child can properly care for his or her teeth alone.

Visit www.MouthMattersIL.com to learn more about good oral health care.

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¹ *Morpac Inc. conducted the 2011 Delta Dental Children's Oral Health Survey. Interviews were conducted by email statewide with 151 primary caregivers of children from birth to age 11. For results based on the total sample of Illinois adults, the margin of error is ± 8 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level.*