

Give Kids a Smile

Minnesota Dental Association

Tips for preventing cavities in baby teeth

Baby tooth decay is a serious, infectious and transmissible disease that can spread quickly and lead to infection without proper precautions. The good news it is preventable when you follow these tips:

- **Mothers and pregnant women should make sure their own mouths are healthy** by getting a professional dental exam and necessary care and by practicing good daily oral hygiene (brush, floss, healthy diet). This reduces transmission of cavity germs from mothers to infants.
- Use breast milk, formula or water in baby's bottle. **Never put juice, soda or other sweetened drinks in a baby bottle.**
- **Do not put an infant or toddler to bed with a bottle** unless it contains only water.
- **Wait until 12 months to give juice** and then limit consumption to meal and snack times.
- The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry encourages parents to have **children drink from a cup by their first birthday.**
- If a child uses a **pacifier, do not dip it in anything sweet like sugar or honey.** If it falls on the ground, do not "clean" it in your own mouth as this can pass cavity-causing germs to the child. Clean with hot water and soap and rinse thoroughly before returning to baby's mouth.
- Provide healthy snacks, such as meat, peanut butter, milk, yogurt, cheese, fruits and vegetables. **Limit sweets** in quantity, portion size and frequency.
- Before baby teeth appear, **gently wipe gums** and inside of the mouth every day, especially after feedings and before bed, with a clean, warm cloth.
- Beginning with the appearance of the first tooth, **brush baby teeth twice a day** with a soft, age-appropriate sized toothbrush and a "smear" of fluoridated toothpaste. For 2 to 5-year-olds, use a "pea size" amount of toothpaste and perform or assist your child's tooth brushing.