**Oral health tips for parent newsletters**

Dental cavities are the most common childhood disease. These cause pain and infections, and reduce children’s ability to learn. Dental problems result in more school absences than any other childhood disease. There are many reasons why children get cavities, but the disease is entirely preventable through fluoride, education, hygiene, and nutrition. Knowing what to do to prevent cavities is important for teachers and parents which is why we’ve compiled oral health tips that you can include in your parent newsletter:

**Keep tiny teeth healthy**

* Practice brushing. Preschoolers should brush their teeth at least twice a day using a tiny piece of fluoride toothpaste. Model brushing techniques by brushing your teeth right along with the children.
* Make brushing fun! Incorporate music and games to reinforce the rhythm of brushing.
* Incorporate dental health into all areas of the classroom. Use the motions of brushing and flossing to create dances or other games, develop stories about tooth characters, or make paintings using toothbrushes.
* Visit the dentist for a check up. Continue regular screening of children’s teeth for cavities and injuries.
* Serve “teeth healthy” foods such as vegetables, meats, grains, and fruits. Try to limit sweet desserts, candy, chips, and crackers and avoid using these foods as treats.
* Use car seats and bike helmets to prevent injuries to the teeth.

**Too much toothpaste?**

* Start brushing your baby's teeth with fluoride toothpaste as soon as the first milk tooth breaks through (usually at around six months, but it can be earlier or later). It's important to use a fluoride paste as this helps prevent and control tooth decay.
* All children can use family toothpaste containing 1,350-1,500ppm fluoride as long as you supervise brushing until the age of seven and make sure they don't eat or lick toothpaste from the tube.
* Children under the age of six who don't have tooth decay can use a lower-strength toothpaste if you prefer, but make sure it contains at least 1,000ppm fluoride. Check the toothpaste packet for this information or ask your dentist.
* Below the age of three years, children should use just a smear of toothpaste.
* Children aged between three and six years should use a pea-sized blob of toothpaste. Check the toothpaste packet for this information or ask your dentist.

**The basics of brushing**

* Brush your child's teeth for about two minutes twice a day: once just before bedtime and at least one other time during the day.
* Encourage them to spit out excess toothpaste but not to rinse with lots of water. Rinsing with water after tooth brushing will wash away the fluoride and reduce its benefits.
* Supervise tooth brushing until your child is seven or eight years old, either by brushing their teeth yourself or, if they brush their own teeth, by watching how they do it. From the age of seven or eight they should be able to brush their own teeth, but it's still a good idea to watch them now and again to make sure they brush properly and for about two minutes.

**Tips to Help Young Children Practice Brushing & Make It A Good Experience:**

* **Choosing a toothbrush.** Use a soft-bristled toothbrush designed for brushing an infant’s or child’s teeth.
* **Holding a toothbrush.** If the child has trouble holding a toothbrush, try making the handle thicker by putting it inside a tennis ball. The toothbrush handle can also be strapped to the child’s hand with a wide rubber band, a hair band, or Velcro. Toothbrushes with thick handles can also be found in retail and discount stores.
* **Teaching the child how to brush.** Break the process into small steps that the child can understand and practice. Ask a [**dentist**](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/health-management/pediatric-specialists/Pages/What-is-a-Pediatric-Dentist.aspx), dental hygienist, [**occupational therapist**](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/developmental-disabilities/Pages/Occupational-Therapy.aspx), or early childhood specialist for help, if needed. Another way is to place a hand over the child’s hand to guide the toothbrush as the child brushes.
* **Using toothpaste with fluoride.**Use toothpaste with [**fluoride**](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/oral-health/Pages/FAQ-Fluoride-and-Children.aspx) that the child likes and that feels good in his or her mouth. An adult should always place toothpaste on the toothbrush.
  + **For children ages 3–6:** Use a pea-size amount of flouride toothpaste.
  + **If a child cannot spit:** Have the child tilt his or her mouth down so that the toothpaste can dribble out into the sink, a cup, or a washcloth. Since the fluoride in toothpaste is clearly meant to be swishes but not swallowed, make sure to help or watch the child while brushing. When she is old enough, tell her to spit out the toothpaste after brushing.
* **Positioning the child.**There are many ways a child can be positioned to make the child feel comfortable and allow an adult to brush his or her teeth.
* **Keeping the child engaged in brushing.** Use a timer, a short song, or counting as a game to encourage brushing for 2 minutes.

**Making sure they brush properly**

* Guide your child's hand so they can feel the correct movement.
* Use a mirror to help your child see where the brush is cleaning their teeth.
* Make tooth brushing as fun as possible by using an egg timer to time it for about two minutes.
* Don't let children run around with a toothbrush in their mouth as they may have an accident and hurt themselves.

**Taking your child to the dentist**

* Take your child to the dentist when the first milk teeth appear. This is so they become familiar with the environment and get to know the dentist. The dentist can help prevent decay and identify any oral health problems at an early stage. Just opening up the child's mouth for the dentist to take a look is useful practise for when they could benefit from future preventative care.
* When you visit the dentist, be positive about it and make the trip fun. This will stop your child worrying about future visits.
* Take your child for regular [dental check-ups](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/dentalhealth/Pages/Dentalcheckups.aspx) as advised by the dentist. NHS dental care for children is free.

**Take care of your teeth**

Good health for kids includes good dental habits. Regular visits to a dentist, brush and flossing teeth, and a good diet will help your child's teeth to become healthy and strong. Tooth decay is the most common chronic childhood disease due to dental-related illnesses. Bad oral health can affect a child’s speech development, school performance and self-esteem.

Children with pain in their mouth or who have missing teeth may have difficulty chewing, which could affect a healthy diet. A poor diet could affect your child’s ability to learn and to concentrate in school.

Here a few tips to keep your kids’ teeth healthy:

* Visit a dentist twice a year
* Brush teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste
* Floss teeth daily
* Avoid sugary snacks and drinks
* Drink more water
* Snack on fruits, vegetables, cheese & whole grain foods
* Wear a mouth guard when playing sports