



Early Childhood Tooth Decay

Early childhood tooth decay can destroy the teeth of an infant or a young child. It is important to begin caring for teeth soon after the baby is born. The upper four front teeth are the most often damaged.

What causes early childhood tooth decay?

Early childhood tooth decay takes place when a child's teeth are exposed many times throughout the day and night to liquids that contain sugar, for example: milk, breast milk, formula, fruit juice, sodas, and other sweetened drinks. The sugars in these liquids pool around the infant's teeth and gums. The bacteria that live in the mouth mix with these sugars to cause tooth decay.

During sleep, the flow of saliva slows down, allowing sugary liquids to pool around the child's teeth for a longer period of time. Therefore parents and caregivers should be especially careful not to give a child a sugary drink at nap or nighttime, or let their child carry a bottle throughout the day.

How serious is early childhood tooth decay?

Early childhood tooth decay can cause painful toothaches, which can make eating and sleeping difficult. Teeth with serious decay can become infected and need to be taken out. If your child's teeth are infected or lost too early, your child may have these problems:

- Poor eating habits
- Speech and language problems
- Crooked teeth
- Damaged adult (permanent) teeth

How to prevent early childhood tooth decay

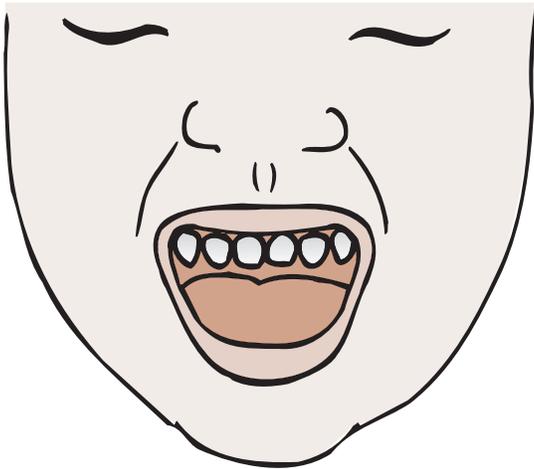
Parents sometimes do not realize that their baby's teeth can begin to decay as soon as they appear.

You can prevent this by doing the following:

- Wipe the child's teeth and gums with a damp washcloth or small soft toothbrush after every feeding. This will remove plaque.
- Brush the teeth twice a day as soon as they appear with a smear of children's fluoride toothpaste.
- Never let your child fall asleep with a bottle that has sweet liquid in it.
- If your child will not fall asleep without a bottle, fill it with water and nothing else.
- Do not use a bottle as a pacifier.
- Help your child learn to drink from a cup by the age of 12-18 months.
- Do not put anything sweet on pacifiers or soothers.
- You may wish to have a counselling appointment with your dentist when your baby's teeth start to come in. If you have any questions call your dentist or Community Health Centre / Office.



THE DIFFERENT STAGES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD TOOTH DECAY

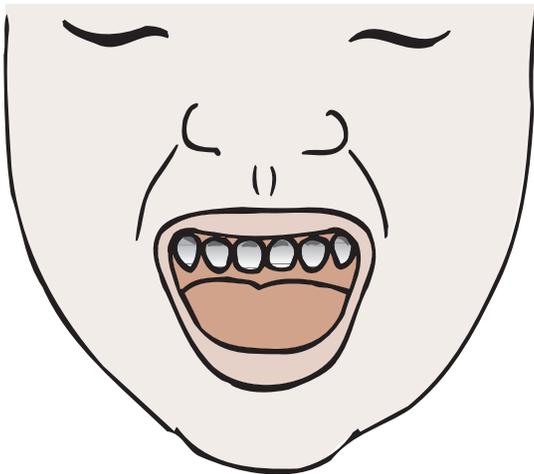
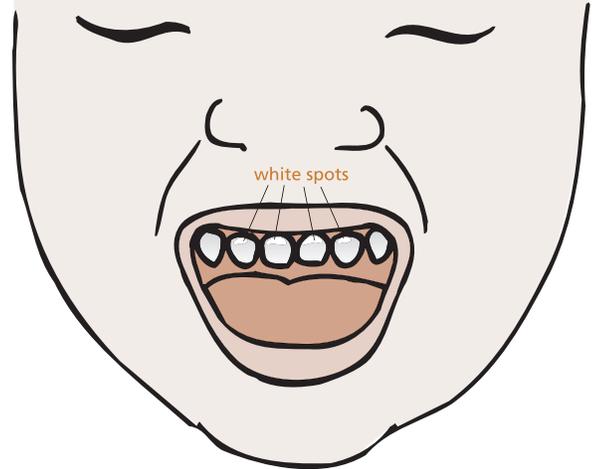


HEALTHY TEETH

You can not see any decay.

EARLY DECAY

"White spots" that are found close to the gum line can be weak spots. Brush your child's teeth with a children's fluoride toothpaste and see a dentist for a follow-up appointment.

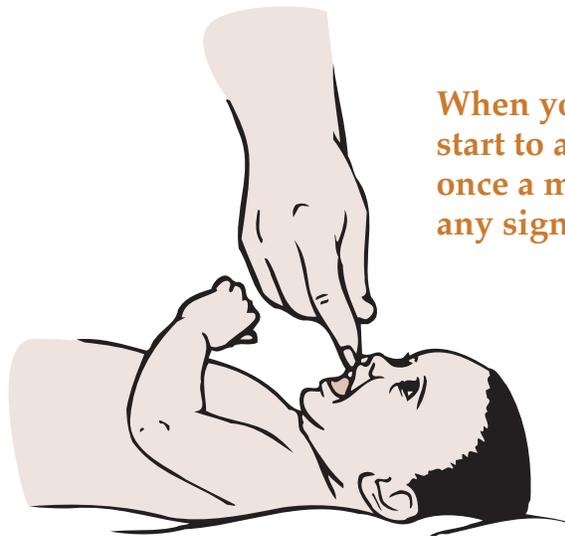
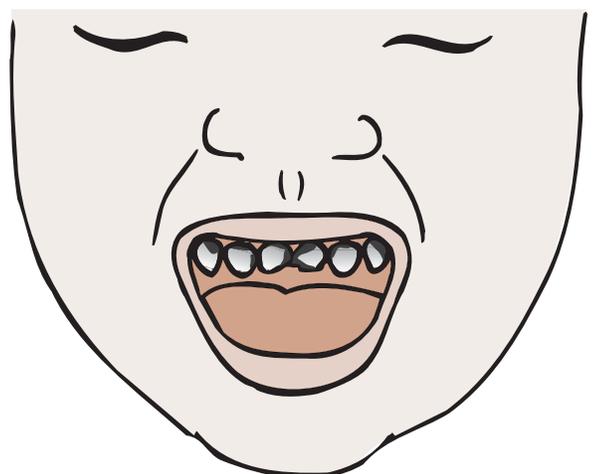


MODERATE DECAY

Take your child to the dentist before the decay gets worse.

SEVERE DECAY

Your child must see a dentist as soon as possible.



When your child's teeth start to appear, lift the lip once a month and look for any signs of tooth decay.

For further information contact your family dentist or the Vancouver Community Dental Health Program at North Community Health Office 604-215-3935.