



University of Kentucky  
College of Agriculture,  
Food and Environment  
Cooperative Extension Service

# PARENT HEALTH BULLETIN



**FEBRUARY 2022**

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**THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:**

## CHILDREN'S DENTAL HEALTH



**F**ebruary is National Children's Dental Health Month. Developing good dental health habits as a youngster, including regular dental visits, helps children get a great start on a lifetime of healthy teeth and gums.

### Having healthy teeth is important.

After a person eats something, there are bacteria in the mouth that eat away at the sugar in the mouth. The bacteria turn the sugar into acid and can cause cavities. If the teeth are not properly cared for, it is likely that cavities will occur, causing a great deal of pain. If children have pain in their mouths, they may find it hard to eat or concentrate in school.

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# Choose a toothbrush made for children — one with soft bristles and a small head made for brushing a child's teeth.

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Consistent brushing is one of the main ways you can keep your child's teeth healthy. You should brush your child's teeth with fluoride toothpaste twice each day to help prevent tooth decay (cavities). The best times are after breakfast and right before bedtime. You want to begin brushing as soon as your child's first tooth begins to show.

If your child struggles with routinely brushing their teeth, here are some tips to help make oral health a good experience:

- **Choose a toothbrush made for children.** Look for toothbrushes with soft bristles and a small head made for brushing a child's teeth. Let your child pick a toothbrush that is a favorite color or has a favorite character on the handle. You should replace a toothbrush at least every three months.
- **Use fluoride toothpaste that your child likes.** Toothpaste comes in different flavors and colors. Find one that your child likes and feels good in their mouth. Encourage your child to spit and not swallow the remaining toothpaste. For children younger than 3, use a rice-size amount of fluoride toothpaste. For children ages 3 to 6, use a pea-size amount of fluoride toothpaste.
- **Make tooth brushing fun.** Sing a song while brushing your child's teeth. Or count or say the alphabet while you brush your child's teeth. You can also tell a story, say a nursery rhyme, or make animal sounds while brushing. It can help to have a timer in the bathroom that lasts about two minutes, to ensure that your child is spending enough time brushing.

The American Association of Pediatric Dentists recommends that parents establish a dental visit for their child by their first tooth or first birthday. A dental visit by age 1 is key for building a lifetime of good oral health. If you are in the market for a dentist, here are some questions that you can ask a dental office before you decide to make an appointment.



- Is your clinic taking new patients?
- Does your clinic take my child's insurance (for example, Medicaid or CHIP)?
- Does clinic staff have training or experience treating young children?
- When is the next appointment for a new patient?
- What happens during a new patient visit?

Your child should visit a dentist at least two times a year (every 6 months). This can be a time to learn more about how to take even better care of the teeth. Encourage your kids to use a mouth guard during sports, which can prevent serious dental injuries. Having healthy teeth will help children chew food, speak clearly, and be confident.

#### RESOURCES:

- <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/coronavirus-disease-oral-health-information-parents-about-promoting-good-oral-health-home>
- <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dental-office-questions.pdf>

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