

## ADA NSW FACT SHEET ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DENTAL VISITS

### When do children start getting teeth?

The first baby tooth comes through at around 6 months of age but teeth can be early or late. All baby teeth are usually present by around 3 years of age and the first adult teeth normally start appearing around age 6.

### When should children visit the dentist?

It is recommended that children have their first dental check-up by their first birthday<sup>1</sup>. At the least, very young children should have an assessment by a child health professional every 6-12 months at their child health checks<sup>2</sup>. This simple check helps to identify signs and high risks of tooth decay. Regular visits with a dentist during childhood are important. For many children a check-up at least every 12 months is sufficient but those at high risk of tooth decay may need more frequent visits until their risk of decay has stabilised<sup>3</sup>.

### Why is it important to get children's teeth checked?

Baby teeth are important for speaking and chewing, and hold space in the jaws for the adult teeth. Tooth decay and trauma can cause pain, infection, difficulties with eating and speech and lead to crowding of the adult teeth. Extensive tooth decay or dental infections in young children may require hospitalisation and treatment under general anaesthetic.

Tooth decay is very common, with 40% of primary school children in NSW having experienced tooth decay in their baby teeth by 5 years of age.<sup>4</sup> Poor oral health in childhood can increase the chance of dental problems in adolescence and adulthood.<sup>5</sup> Regular check-ups help to prevent problems and can even reverse very early-stage tooth decay.

### What will be checked at a child's dental visit?

- Oral hygiene, such as toothbrushing techniques and the use of fluoride toothpaste
- Risk and signs of tooth decay and health of gums
- Growth and development of teeth and jaws and problems with the bite
- Diet and feeding patterns
- Habits such as dummy sucking or thumb sucking

### Dentistry is expensive. How can the cost be reduced?

- Most dentistry is performed by private dentists and private health insurance covers at least part of the cost of dental treatment.
- Any child who is eligible for Medicare is eligible for free public dental treatment in the Local Health District where they normally live, however waiting lists at public clinics can be long.

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- The Medicare-funded Child Dental Benefit Schedule (CDBS) provides up to \$1000 of dental treatment for eligible children aged 2-17 over two calendar years for a range of dental treatments in a private setting.

### **How can you find out if a child is eligible for the CDBS?**

Families who holds a Health Care Card, receive a Centrelink payment or Family Tax Benefit A, may be eligible for the CDBS. Eligibility can be checked by asking the reception of your dental clinic, calling Medicare on 132 011 or visiting [www.humanservices.gov.au](http://www.humanservices.gov.au).

### **How can the health of children's teeth be checked at home?**

'Lift the Lip' is a simple way to check children's teeth at home. The top and bottom lip are lifted and the teeth are checked for white patches, which are the early warning signs for decay. Grey, brown or black spots indicate more serious decay. If signs of decay are found it is important to book an appointment with a dentist.<sup>6</sup>.

### **How can children's teeth be kept healthy?**

- Avoid putting anything in a baby bottle except water, breast milk, milk or baby formula
- At sleep times, bottles left with a baby or toddler should only contain water
- Reduce the number times sugary foods and drinks are consumed each day
- Be aware of hidden sugars in foods and drinks such as dried fruits, breakfast cereals, muesli bars, flavoured yoghurts, flavoured milks and fruit juices
- Make tap water the normal drink
- Start twice daily toothbrushing as soon as the first tooth comes through
- Use a small pea sized amount of fluoride toothpaste from 18 months of age<sup>2</sup>
- Supervise your child's toothbrushing until the age of 7 years<sup>2</sup>

### **References**

1. Australian Dental Association Policy Statement 2.3.1- Delivery of Oral Health: Special Groups: Children, 2017
2. Early Childhood Oral Health Guidelines for Child Health Professionals, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Centre for Oral Health Strategy NSW, 2014
3. The Caries Management System: an evidence-based preventive strategy for dental practitioners. Application for children and adolescents, Evans and Dennison, Australian Dental Journal, 2009; 54: 381-389
4. The NSW Child Dental Health Survey 2007, Centre For Oral Health Strategy NSW, 2009
5. NSW Early Childhood Oral Health Program Evaluation, Centre for Oral Health Strategy NSW, 2010
6. Australian Dental Association <https://www.ada.org.au/Your-Dental-Health/Children-0-11/Toddlers>

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