



## Have You Checked Your Child's Dental Health?

What you do now to take care of your child's dental health from infancy through the teen years will affect your child later on as an adult. Oral diseases, which are progressive and become more complex over time, affect your child's ability to eat, the foods he chooses, his appearance, his manner of communication, and his attention to learning.

Failure to care for your child's dental health can have serious consequences. A recent report of the Surgeon General on [Oral Health in America](#) highlights the status of the dental health of our nation's children:

- Tooth decay is the single most common chronic childhood disease – 5 times more common than asthma and 7 times more common than hay fever.
- More than 51 million school hours are lost each year to dental-related illnesses.
- Children from families living below the poverty line (annual income of \$18,100 for a family of four) have more severe and untreated dental problems.

There are several steps you can take to care for your child's dental health. One important step is to carefully select the dentist who cares for your child. Remember that children's dental needs are different than adults.

Other steps you can take to help assure a lifetime of dental health for your child include:

- Don't let your child fall asleep with his bottle (nipple) in his mouth. The bacteria from the milk/formula/juices will accumulate on your child's teeth while he's sleeping. Bedtime or naptime bottles, if necessary, should only contain plain water. Baby bottle tooth decay is a leading cause of dental problems in young children.
- Gently cleanse your infant's gums with a soft, wet washcloth or gauze pad after each feeding. Any soft-bristled toothbrush with a small head, especially one designed for infants, should be used once a day at bedtime to remove the plaque bacteria that can lead to decay.
- Schedule regular appointments with the dentist, beginning with the eruption of your child's first tooth. Check-ups every six months are recommended to help prevent cavities and other dental problems.
- Supervise and teach your children to follow the program of brushing, flossing, and other treatments recommended by your dentist
- Provide your child with a balanced diet, including one serving daily of fruits and vegetables, breads and cereals, milk and dairy products, and meat, fish, and eggs. Limit servings of sugars and starches.
- Ask your dentist to evaluate the fluoride level of your child's primary source of drinking water to make certain your child is getting enough fluoride internally.

*For more information, contact Riley Hospital for Children's Community Education Department at 317-274-2964 or click [www.rileyforkids.org](http://www.rileyforkids.org)*