

Importance of Childhood Oral Hygiene and Dental Care

Tooth decay, even in the earliest stages of life, can have serious implications for a child's long-term health and well-being. A report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, comparing the dental health in Americans in 1988-1994 and 1999-2004, found a 15.2 percent increase in cavities among two to five year olds. Other studies indicate that tooth decay is a chronic disease affecting 50% of first graders and 80% of 17 year olds. A study in the Pediatric Dental Journal showed that children with cavities were significantly more likely to weigh less than 80 percent of their ideal body weight. Even more disturbing is the evidence that the effects of poor oral health may be felt for a lifetime. Emerging research suggests that improper dental care and oral hygiene may increase a child's risk later in life for developing heart disease, cancer, or stroke. Women who had poor oral hygiene and lacked adequate dental care as a child have a higher risk of giving birth to low weight babies. The National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research estimates that children will miss 52 million hours of school each year due to oral health problems and about 12.5 million days of restricted activity every year from dental symptoms. Because there is such a significant loss in their academic performance, the Surgeon General has made children's oral health a priority.

Good Oral Hygiene Includes:

- Regular visits to the dentist*
- Brushing your teeth a minimum of two times a day*
- Flossing daily*
- Limiting frequency of snacking, which can increase a child's risk of developing cavities*
- Determining if the water supply that serves your home is fluoridated, if not, discussing supplement options with your dentist*
- Taking good care of your own teeth. Studies show that babies and small children can catch cavity causing bacteria from their parents.*

Please take time to care for your teeth and your family's teeth. Remember they have to last you a lifetime.

Your School Nurses,

Ruth Barchfeld RN, BSN, CSN

Nancie Weber RN, BSN

Renee Riggio RN, BSN