

# HOW TO PROTECT YOUR BABY'S TEETH FROM CAVITIES

*Did you know that cavities are caused by germs that are passed from adult to child?*

Babies are born without the bacteria that causes caries- the disease that leads to cavities. They get it from spit that is passed from their caregiver's mouth to their own. Caregivers pass on these germs by sharing saliva- by sharing spoons, by testing foods before feeding it to babies, by cleaning off a pacifier in their mouth instead of with water, and through other activities where saliva is shared.

These germs can start the process that causes cavities even before babies have teeth, so it's important to avoid sharing saliva with your baby right from the start. See below for more tips on how to keep your baby- and your baby's teeth- healthy and happy.

## For you:

- Eat healthy foods to reduce the cavity-causing germs in your mouth.
- Brush your teeth with a toothpaste that contains fluoride.
- Do not put anything in your baby's mouth that has been in your mouth including spoons or a toothbrush, do not blow on your baby's food
- Do not use your spit to clean your baby's pacifier - use water instead.
- If you have bleeding gums or cavities, you should visit your dentist as soon as possible.

## For your baby:

- Before your baby's first tooth becomes visible in the mouth, you should wipe the mouth every day with a soft, moist washcloth. As soon as teeth become visible in the mouth, brush the teeth with a small soft bristle toothbrush that contains a pea-sized smear of fluoride-containing toothpaste.
- Encourage your baby to spit out the toothpaste.
- You should brush your child's teeth at least twice each day - once in the morning and once at night. Remember, the most important time to brush your baby's teeth is right before bedtime.
- Talk to your baby's pediatrician or pediatric dentist about the right amount of fluoride for your baby. Ask if your child should be brushing with toothpaste that contains fluoride.
- Avoid giving your baby sticky foods and unhealthy snacks like candy, soda or juice in between meals. Instead, give your baby healthy snacks like cheese, yogurt or fruit. Only give your baby treats or juice at meal times.
- Establish bedtime routines that do not involve using the bottle filled with milk or juice to soothe the baby to sleep. Also avoid having the baby sleep with a bottle filled with milk or juice as the natural sugars in these liquids will get changed to acid, which will rot or decay the teeth and lead to dental infection and pain. Avoid having your baby drink from a sippy cup filled with juice between meals.
- Do not give your baby juice until he is 6 months old. Do not give your baby more than 4-6 ounces of juice per day.
- If you see white spots developing on your baby's teeth, then take your baby to a pediatric dentist right away. A white spot is often the first sign of a dental cavity.
- Schedule your baby's first dental visit with a pediatric dentist when she is one year old. Pediatric dentists have additional training beyond dental school working with babies and young children. Remember - first tooth, first birthday, first dental visit!

