



# TINY SMILES

**Baby teeth are important.** They help your child chew, speak, and smile. They also help permanent teeth grow in the correct position. Did you know that children can get cavities as soon as their teeth first appear? Nearly one in four children ages 2–5 has cavities in their baby teeth.<sup>1</sup> Cavities can hurt. Cavities also can cause children to have problems eating, speaking, learning, playing, and sleeping. Children learn healthy habits from their parents and caregivers. Read below to find out how you can help prevent cavities and promote healthy habits.

## HELP PREVENT CAVITIES

### DURING PREGNANCY



- ▶ Children's teeth begin to develop between the third and sixth months of pregnancy. To help baby teeth develop correctly, be sure to get plenty of nutrients and eat a balanced diet. For tips on how to eat a balanced diet, visit [choosemyplate.gov](http://choosemyplate.gov).

▶ It is important to go to the dentist during pregnancy. Also, remember to brush your teeth two times a day for two minutes, clean between teeth, and drink water with fluoride to help keep your own teeth and gums healthy and strong.

### BIRTH to 1ST TOOTH (around 6 months)



- ▶ Gently wipe baby's gums with a clean, damp, soft washcloth or gauze after each feeding.
- ▶ Breastfeed your baby for at least the first six months of life, if possible. To help prevent tooth decay, fill your baby's bottle only with formula or milk. Finish bottle feedings before putting your baby to bed.

- ▶ You can pass cavity-causing germs to your child, so don't put your baby's pacifier in your mouth to clean it. And don't share feeding spoons. Rinse pacifiers with water to clean them.
- ▶ Don't dip pacifiers in sugar, honey, or other foods.

### 1ST TOOTH to 3 YEARS OLD



- ▶ Take your child to the dentist for a first checkup after the first tooth appears or by the time your child turns 1.
- ▶ Brush your child's teeth two times a day (morning and night). Use a baby toothbrush and a smear of fluoride toothpaste the size of a grain of rice. Start cleaning between teeth daily as soon as your child has two teeth that touch.

- ▶ Protect your child's teeth with fluoride. Talk to your dentist or pediatrician about your child's fluoride needs.
- ▶ Sippy cups should be used only until around your child's first birthday. Do not let your child sip drinks with sugar all day.

### 3 to 5 YEARS OLD



- ▶ Brush your child's teeth for two minutes, two times a day. Use a pea-size amount of fluoride toothpaste and a small, soft toothbrush. Take turns—brush your child's teeth one time and then have them do it the next time. Supervise brushing until your child can spit out the toothpaste instead of swallowing it, around age 6.

- ▶ Clean between their teeth daily—for example, with dental floss.
- ▶ Encourage your child to eat fruits, vegetables, and foods that are low in sugar and to drink fluoridated water. Limit snacks, candy, juice, soft drinks, and sticky treats.
- ▶ Ask your child's dentist or doctor about putting fluoride varnish on your child's teeth to prevent cavities.

Visit [MouthHealthy.org](http://MouthHealthy.org) for more tips from the American Dental Association to help your child have their best smile!

<sup>1</sup> Dye BA, Thornton-Evans G, Li X, Iafolla TJ. Dental caries and sealant prevalence in children and adolescents in the United States, 2011–2012. NCHS data brief, no 191. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2015. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db191.pdf>