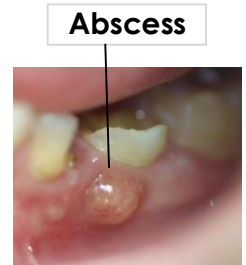


What is a tooth abscess?

A tooth abscess is an infection inside the tooth. The infection kills the tissues inside the tooth. Infected fluid called pus may collect. If not treated, a tooth abscess can spread the infection to the bone and tissues of the face. Signs of a tooth abscess can be:



- Toothache. The pain is normally constant, throbbing, very bad and sharp feeling.
- Pain that is worse with chewing or when sleeping. Your child may wake up at night with tooth pain.
- Pain that is worse with hot food or liquids.
- Bad smelling breath.
- Fever.
- Swollen gums near infected tooth.
- Swollen glands of the neck.
- Swollen area of the upper or lower jaw. **This is more serious.**

What causes it?

- The abscess can be caused by a cavity. It may also be caused by an injury to the tooth, like a broken or chipped tooth.
- Openings in the tooth enamel let bacteria infect the center of the tooth (pulp).
- Infection can then spread out from the root of the tooth to the bones that support the tooth.

How is it treated?

Your child should see a dentist. The goals of treatment are:

- Get rid of the infection. Antibiotics may be given to fight the infection.
- Remove dead tissue.
- To save the tooth. The dentist will help decide if the abscess should be drained, if the tooth should be pulled out or if surgery should be done to try and save the tooth.
- Prevent more problems.

How can I help my child?

- Warm salt water rinses may be soothing. Mix 1 tsp. of salt in a cup of warm water. Have your child swish and spit every 3 to 4 hours.
- Check with your dentist or doctor to see if you can give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol®, Tempra®) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin). These may help relieve pain and fever. Do **not** give your child aspirin without first checking with your dentist or doctor.
- If your child's lip or cheek is swollen, warm, wet compresses to the face may help.
- Your child should keep brushing their teeth, including gently brushing the affected tooth.

How can a tooth abscess be prevented?

- Keeping teeth healthy is the best way to prevent a tooth abscess. Children should begin brushing before 1 year old.
- Adults should help children brush until they are about 6 years old. Brush your child's teeth twice a day, especially before bed. Use a soft toothbrush and toothpaste. Children who can spit may use a toothpaste containing fluoride.
- Your child should begin seeing a dentist by age 1. Find a primary dentist for your child. This dentist should coordinate all of your child's dental needs as they grow. This is called a dental home.
- Floss your child's teeth to clean between the teeth where a brush can't reach.
- Your child should see a dentist for regular dental checkups. Try to avoid cavities by giving less sugary foods and drinks.



ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has:

- A constant, throbbing toothache.
- A fever of 101°F (38.3° C).
- A swollen upper or lower jaw that is getting worse after being on antibiotics for 2 to 3 days.
- An abscess that drains by itself.
- Had a recent tooth injury.
- Special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.