

## Why is dental and oral health important?

Dental decay is the most common disease in American children. Early and regular dental care is important. It may help avoid costly dental problems in the future.

## What can parents do?

As soon as your baby has their first tooth, decay may start. Here are some simple tips to help prevent early tooth decay.

### Birth to 6 months

- Never let your baby fall asleep with a bottle in their mouth. Do not leave a bottle in your baby's crib during naps or overnight.
- After you feed your baby and at bedtime, wipe your baby's mouth with a damp washcloth or gauze pad.
- Fluoride helps prevent tooth decay. It is often added to the water supply. Talk to your child's doctor or dentist about fluoride in the water you drink in your home. If needed, there are fluoride products that you can buy in pharmacies (over-the-counter). Sometimes a prescription for fluoride may be needed.

### 6 to 12 months

- As the first tooth comes in, brush your baby's teeth after each feeding and at bedtime. Use a small, soft-bristle toothbrush. Also clean and massage gums in the rest of your child's mouth.
- Once the first tooth comes in, call a dentist for an exam.

### 12 to 24 months

- Take your child for regular dental visits, starting at one year of age. Most often, dental visits are suggested every 6 months. If you think your child has a dental problem, contact your child's dentist right away.
- Tooth brushing should be done for children by a parent two times a day. Use a soft bristle brush that is the right size for your child. A small smear of fluoride toothpaste may be used across the toothbrush, but not necessary. It is most important to focus on brushing the material off that forms on the teeth each day.
- Start flossing your child's teeth when all baby teeth start to touch together. This normally starts to happen by age 2 to 2 ½ years.

**ALERT:** Call your child's doctor, nurse or clinic if you have any concerns or your child has special health care needs not covered by this information.

**This document was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.**