

Preserving Your Baby's Dental Health

(NAPSA)—When it comes to caring for an infant, most parents are well aware of the need for routine pediatrician visits as part of their baby's health care regimen. What's less well-recognized is the importance that early and regular dental care plays. For optimal oral health, the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) recommends that dental visits begin with the appearance of a child's first tooth as an effective way to kick-start a lifelong program of preventive dental care.

One Baby Tooth + One Pediatric Dental Visit = Zero Cavities

"The 'first-tooth visit' lets the pediatric dentist check for proper oral and facial development, see if the teeth are growing in properly, and detect early tooth decay," says H. Pitts Hinson, president of the AAPD. "It also gives the dentist a chance to walk parents through a complete program of home dental care for the child."

Tooth decay, even in the earliest stages of life, can have serious implications for a child's long-term health and well-being—and it's becoming more of a problem every day. A recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention comparing the dental health of Americans in 1988-1994 and 1999-2002 found a 15.2 percent increase in cavities among two- to five-year olds. In addition, the U.S. Surgeon General has identified tooth decay as the most common childhood disease.

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Decay-Fighting Tips

In addition to regular dental visits, there are many things parents can do to help their children prevent tooth decay:

- Brush your child's gums twice a day with a soft cloth or baby toothbrush and water even before the first tooth appears.
- Talk to your pediatric dentist about your child's fluoride needs.
- If you must put your child to sleep with a bottle, use nothing but water — other beverages can lead to cavities.
- Never dip a pacifier into honey or anything sweet before giving it to a baby.
- The best times for your child to brush are after breakfast and before bed.
- Limit frequency of snacking, which can increase a child's risk of developing cavities.
- Take good care of your own teeth. Studies show that babies and small children can "catch" cavity-causing bacteria from their parents.

For more pediatric dental care tips or to locate a pediatric dentist in your area, visit www.aapd.org.



trend is the fact that only three out of five children visit a dentist at least once a year. While parents may avoid taking a child to the dentist to save money, studies show that children who have their first dental visit before age one have 40 percent lower dental costs in their first five years than children who don't, making preventive care a sound health and economic decision.

Without preventive care, the impact of tooth decay on child development can be striking. A study in *Pediatric Dentistry* showed that children with cavities were significantly more likely to weigh less than 80 percent of their ideal body weight. Even more disturbing is evidence that the effects of poor oral health may be felt for a lifetime. Emerging research sug-

gests that improper oral hygiene may increase a child's risk of having low-birth-weight babies, developing heart disease or suffering a stroke as an adult.

No one is better-equipped to care for primary teeth than pediatric dentists. Pediatric dentists complete two to three years of advanced training after dental school, preparing them to address the unique needs of infants, children and adolescents—including those with special health care requirements. Having the first dental visit in an office designed for kids before the onset of any tooth problems establishes trust and confidence in dental care in children that can carry over into adulthood.

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