

# DENTAL HEALTH

## Tooth Be Told: Managing Children's Oral Health In A Pandemic

(NAPS)—Regular dental cleanings for kids are one of many aspects of people's lives that have been interrupted over the past year. However, instilling good dental hygiene habits early is still critical in helping ensure long-lasting oral health for your child.

If you are able and comfortable, a visit to your dental provider can help. Most dental plans cover children starting at birth. (A child should see a dentist by the eruption of the first tooth or at one year of age.) In addition, there are plenty of ways to maintain proper oral health at home.

### **More time at home, more opportunities to brush**

Perhaps one of the benefits of spending more time at home is the ease of access to brush your teeth after each meal, thus reducing bacteria and helping protect your enamel from damage.

Make it a bonding activity—after each meal, brush your teeth with your children or send them with their siblings to help establish the habit.

### **Develop a floss-ophy**

If done correctly, flossing is incredibly important to oral health, which is why it's imperative to establish its importance for children at a young age.

The emphasis here is on making sure it is done properly, so let them imitate you. Watching you floss your teeth is one of the best ways for kids to learn how to floss their own to help to polish the sides of teeth, prevent tartar and keep bad breath at bay.

### **Winter is dry enough—stay hydrated**

Some children may be at home more now with virtual learning and more prone to snacking throughout the day. Unfortunately, this does not necessarily equate to drinking more water but it should. Encourage keeping a water bottle on hand to stay hydrated and wash away bacteria after snacking.

Sugar can stay on your teeth for up to 20 minutes after you eat and it is unrealistic for anyone—let alone young children—to brush their teeth after every



### **Brush and floss your teeth with your children so they learn good habits.**

crunch of cracker or sweetened beverage. Making the switch from sugary sips to water is a small way to make a big impact on children's oral health.

### **Snack smarter**

Distance learning has many students visiting their pantry at home as often as they would their locker in school. Make it easier for your children to make healthy choices by stocking the pantry with healthy options such as prepped fruits and veggies, granola or roasted chickpeas.

This will have a positive effect not only on their oral health, but also their overall health.

### **Fight cavities with fluoride**

At home, there is a possibility that your household water is not fluoridated as it may have been for your children at school. However, fluoride is crucial in the fight against cavities.

Help your kids get their fluoride fix with fluoride toothpaste or even fluoride-filled lollipops--both of which will help to strengthen the enamel, prevent tooth decay and reduce the negative effects of plaque.

"Although most cavities are preventable, tooth decay is the most common childhood disease of children over six years old," says Dr. Gregory Theis, director, Dental Services, Delta Dental of Wisconsin. "The key to cavity prevention is putting all of the above-mentioned tips into practice, working toward healthier oral and overall health in children."

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**Note to Editors:** While the information in this article is useful to everyone at any time, it's most helpful to residents of Wisconsin and during February which is National Children's Dental Health Month.