

A photograph of two young children against a dark blue background. In the foreground, a child with dark skin and curly hair is smiling broadly, looking upwards. In the background, another child is laughing joyfully while holding a large red balloon with white polka dots. The lighting is soft and focused on the children's faces.

# **ORAL HEALTH IS IMPORTANT**

**A guide for caregivers of  
children with HIV infection**

## BABY TEETH ARE IMPORTANT

For chewing foods, speech, and the growth of adult teeth. Baby teeth also affect the growth and appearance of your child. Infants and toddlers may have trouble sleeping or eating solid foods. During these stressful times, parents may use bottles to calm children or to help keep them from losing weight. Overuse of bottles and sippy cups may cause tooth decay (cavities) which can lead to pain, infection, malnourishment and poor weight gain. These are serious problems for your child.

## CAVITIES, SUGARS, & STARCH, & BLEEDING GUMS

In the mouth, sugars and starch are broken down by germs (bacteria) into acids. These acids cause tooth decay. Sugars are in milk, formulas, juices, nutritional supplements and many medications. The liquid and pudding foods your doctor recommends to maintain your child's weight have sugars. It is important to clean your child's mouth to prevent cavities and bleeding gums. The most important time is before bed.

## ABOUT ORAL LESIONS/THRUSH

Children with HIV infection may suffer thrush (candidiasis) and other infections in their mouth. Cleaning your child's mouth and limiting sugars and starch is important in controlling thrush. Thrush is most often seen as white patches or reddened areas that appear on the roof of the mouth and /or tongue. Tell your pediatrician and dentist if you see sores or thrush in your child's mouth.



## TO PREVENT PROBLEMS, START RIGHT AFTER BIRTH

Clean your child's mouth each day, even before you can see the first baby tooth. As often as possible, clean the mouth after each feeding and before bed. Be sure to wash your hands before and after cleaning your child's mouth.

**You can do a lot to keep your child's mouth healthy**

## HOW TO CLEAN A CHILD'S MOUTH

### *For infants:*

- Sit your child on your lap, facing away from you. Support your child's head with your arm and hand
- Use the index finger and thumb of your supporting hand to gently open the mouth and support the lower jaw.
- Wrap a piece of gauze or clean washcloth around the index finger of your other hand. Moisten it with water. Be sure to wipe the roof of the mouth, tongue, cheeks and pocket areas between the jaw and cheeks, as well as their gums.





- You can use a children's soft toothbrush to clean the teeth.
- If you have open cuts or sores on your hands, or you see blood in your child's mouth, consider using latex gloves when cleaning your child's mouth.

*For children who can stand or sit:*

- Position yourself behind the child. Clean the entire mouth as described on the previous page.

## HELPFUL TIPS

- Use only a "pea sized" amount of toothpaste on the gauze pad, washcloth or toothbrush. If your child doesn't like the flavor, try another brand. Clean your child's mouth, even if he or she doesn't like toothpaste.
- Praise toddlers and older children when they clean their own teeth and mouth.
- Clean your teeth after each meal. If your children watch you brush, they will be more likely to brush, too.

- Talk about why it is important to clean their teeth and gums. Help your child until he or she can do it alone.
- For a fussy child, consider asking another person to help you clean the child's mouth.
- It may be helpful to play music or say a rhyme while cleaning your child's teeth and gums.
- For more tips, talk to your child's dentist or pediatrician.

## HOW TO PREVENT PROBLEMS

- Try not to leave a bottle of milk, formula or juice in the crib or bed with your child.
- If your child needs a bottle to go to sleep, give the bottle to the child in your lap. After the bottle is done, put the child in the bed.
- If you must leave your child in the crib with a bottle, thin the contents with water. You can get your child used to water in two or three weeks if you add a little more water to the bottle each night until it is all water.
- All non-feeding bottles (bottles used to calm your child) should be diluted with water and, over time, changed to all water.





- If you give medicines by mouth while your child sleeps, follow with a little water in the same way that you gave the medicine. You can also use a plastic or bulb syringe to give a little water along the side of the cheek.

- Aim to stop bottle feedings by your child's first birthday. This may be difficult for a sick or disabled baby. It is important that the baby

gets enough fluids. Ask your pediatrician for advice on use of the bottle for ongoing feeding problems.

- Your child's first dental visit should be before the first birthday.

## ADVICE ABOUT SNACKS

- Never give your child a pacifier moistened with a sweetened liquid.
- Avoid sweetened cereals, especially when eaten dry.
- Offer water or fruit juice diluted with water in between meals, instead of juice.
- As often as possible, follow snacks with water or brushing.



**As often as possible, clean or rinse your child's mouth with water after bottles, foods or medicine**

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FLUORIDE

Fluoride helps strengthen your child's teeth. Ask your pediatrician about fluoride.



**Watch children brush their own teeth and help them make sure their mouth is clean**

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