



Baby Bottle Tooth Decay

A preventable dental condition involving the rapid decay of many or all of the baby teeth of an infant or toddler.

Signs

- Typically, the first sign of baby bottle tooth decay (BBTD) are white spots on the smooth surface of the front teeth. If untreated, these white spots will quickly develop into tooth decay.
- Teeth that have tooth decay may appear brown or black.
- Mouth pain and infection may be present.
- Fever, irritability and swelling of the gums, cheeks and face may accompany the infection.

What to Know

- All children are vulnerable to BBTD.
- Bacteria that causes tooth decay can be transferred by caregivers to infants by sharing items such as pacifiers and eating utensils (spoons, forks, cups, bottles).
- Any child who eats sugary foods, those allowed nighttime bottle-feeding or prolonged sippy cup use, and those with poor oral care are at greater risk of BBTD.
- If teeth must be extracted due to decay, speech and chewing can be affected.
- BBTD places the child at greater risk for decay in the permanent teeth.

What to Do

- Contact your local water department to determine or test the fluoride level of your water. If the fluoride level is too low or too high, contact your health-care provider.
- From birth until the age of 5 or 6 months when the baby teeth start to emerge, use a damp cloth or gauze to gently clean the gums daily.
- Once teeth emerge, use a small, soft-bristled toothbrush.
- Replace the bottle with a cup at around 6 to 12 months of age.
- Infants should be weaned from a bottle around their first birthday and from a sippy cup by age 2.
- The first dental visit should occur around age 1.
- Infants should not be put to sleep with a bottle or sippy cup. When the infant falls asleep, saliva production decreases rapidly. Swallowing also decreases, and liquids present in the mouth at the time of falling asleep tend to pool around the teeth and cause tooth decay.
- Limit juice to no more than six ounces per day and offer only in a cup at mealtime.
- Sweeteners should never be used on a pacifier.

When to Call Your Health-Care Provider or Dentist

- If the child has any signs of tooth decay.
- If the child shows signs of infection, such as pain, fever, irritability, redness and swelling of the gums, cheeks and face.
- If the child has an unwillingness to eat.
- If the child has a foul odor from the mouth.
- Treatment varies depending on the severity of the decay. Some treatments may include the use of topical fluorides, fluoride supplements, diet changes, use of filling materials or crowns/caps to restore teeth, or teeth removal.

Adapted From Nine Months to Get Ready. . . You Can Make a Difference, the Arizona Department of Health Services.