Dental Health in Child Care

Child care providers can help promote young children's dental health by teaching good dental habits.

Here are some general tips for child care providers to help keep children's teeth healthy.
Begin good dental care early.

Start cleaning infants' gums even before teeth appear. Child care providers should wipe infants' gums after each feeding to remove germs. Encourage parents to clean infants' gums at home and suggest that they begin using a small toothbrush without toothpaste when the first tooth appears.
Dental Health in Child Care

Build on children’s early interest in brushing.

Toddlers and infants are likely to express a lot of interest in the care of teeth. They love to watch adults and older children brush and floss their teeth. This early interest can lead to good dental habits later on. Build in tooth brushing as a regular part of the mealtime routine in child care. Set a good example by brushing your own teeth after meals.
Be sure each child has a personal toothbrush.

Label the brush with the child’s name. Dentists generally recommend a small toothbrush with soft nylon bristles. Ask parents to replace worn brushes every three to four months. Store toothbrushes in a covered area out of children's reach.
Wait until children are 2 or 3 years old to start fluoridated toothpaste.

Until children are 2 or 3, child care providers can help them clean their teeth with water and a soft-bristled toothbrush. When children start using toothpaste after age 2 or 3, supervise brushing and make sure children use just a small smear on the brush. Children should spit out and not swallow excess toothpaste after brushing.
Avoid sharing the toothpaste tube.

Children who use the same tube of toothpaste may spread germs. Instead, use one of the following strategies in your child care program:

• Have families bring a toothpaste tube for each individual child. Label the tube with his or her name.
• At tooth-brushing time, give each child a small paper cup with a dab of toothpaste along the rim. Help the child pick up the toothpaste with the tooth brush. Each child uses his or her own cup after brushing for rinsing and then throws away the cup.
• Place dabs of toothpaste along the edges of a paper plate. Help each child pick up the toothpaste with the brush.
Dental Health in Child Care

Teach children how to brush.

Children should brush their teeth in a circular motion on both the inside and outside surfaces of teeth and gums. Remind children to brush top to bottom and back to front. This habit will help ensure that all tooth surfaces are brushed. A quick brush on the tongue and a swish of water will complete the job. Whenever it is not possible to brush after meals, have children rinse out their mouths with water.
Store toothbrushes upright.

Place brushes with bristle ends up and not touching each other. You can make a toothbrush holder out of a small cube-shaped box. Punch holes on top for each brush. An upside-down egg carton also works well as a holder.
Dental Health in Child Care

Keep brushes clean.

Wash children's toothbrushes at least once a week with soap and water.

Washing brushes in the dishwasher may be convenient. Remember to rinse well with water.
Check on fluoride use.

Check to see if your community fluoridates its water. Fluoride helps prevent tooth decay by strengthening tooth enamel. Fluoride in drinking water can reduce tooth decay by 15 to 40 percent. If you do not have fluoride in your water, discuss with parents the possibility of using fluoride drops or tablets. Follow the parents' guidelines for each individual child in your child care program.
Dental Health in Child Care

Serve healthy foods to help children keep teeth healthy.

Avoid or limit sweet drinks, candy, jelly, cake, cookies, sugared gelatin and sticky fruits such as dates or raisins. When you do serve sweets, make sure that children eat them at one sitting. Eating a cookie at snack time is better than sucking on a lollipop or hard candy all afternoon.
This slide show is complete.

Click on next page to continue with the training.