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## PREVENTING CAVITIES FROM THE CRADLE

Health experts urge Arizona's parents to take tots to dentist

**\*\* MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE WITH PARENTS, DENTISTS, STATE EXPERTS \*\***

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PHOENIX – A visit to the dentist is often the last thing on a new parent's "to-do" list. The Arizona Department of Health Services is trying to change that.

Supported by dental and pediatric professional organizations and a groundswell of oral health experts, the ADHS 2008 "First Dental Visit by Age One" campaign stresses the importance of dental visits no later than a child's first birthday. It also reiterates to dentists the value of performing infant dental exams and establishing a dental home for children early in their lives.

"Dental visits by age one are critical because tooth decay is the most common chronic disease among children. In fact, 34% of Arizona children have experienced tooth decay by the age of three," said RaNee Tuscano, preschool prevention program manager in the ADHS Office of Oral Health. "Early intervention can prevent dental disease, reduce the cost of providing care, and eliminate pain and suffering for our children today and later in life."

Tooth decay is a highly preventable disease that is passed to infants from their parents and intimate caregivers. Parents can do simple things to help prevent oral disease, such as:

- Avoid sharing spoons, pacifiers and cups with your child, and do not clean pacifiers with your mouth.
- Practice proper brushing and flossing, limit your intake of sugar, and see a dentist regularly.
- Brush your child's teeth twice daily with a soft toothbrush and floss between them daily as soon as they touch.
- Limit your child's intake of juice as recommended by your doctor (usually ½ cup per day) and do not give your baby soda or sports drinks.
- Do not serve sugary drinks in bottles or sippy cups and avoid putting anything but water in bed-time bottles.
- Take your child to the dentist no later than the first birthday and continue visits at least once every 6 months.

*Media members can use the contact information above to arrange interviews and get more information for stories and segments. The public is encouraged to call (602) 542-1867 or visit [www.AZSmiles.org](http://www.AZSmiles.org) for more information about this campaign.*

## Top 10 Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. Can babies get tooth decay (cavities)?

Yes. Teeth are at risk for tooth decay (cavities) as soon as they appear in the mouth. It is important to keep your baby's teeth and gums clean and healthy to prevent tooth decay. If tooth decay is found early, it is easier to treat. Early prevention is the best way to protect your child from oral disease.

### 2. Can my oral health affect my child's oral health?

Yes. Babies do not have the germs that cause tooth decay when they are born. They get germs from parents and other intimate caregivers. Keeping your mouth healthy leaves fewer germs to pass to your baby. The better your oral health is, the better your child's oral health will be.

### 3. What is "baby bottle" tooth decay?

Tooth decay in infants and children is known as Early Childhood Dental Caries (ECC), or "baby bottle" tooth decay. In children under 3 years of age, it most often occurs in the upper front teeth, but other teeth may also be affected.

### 4. What causes baby bottle tooth decay?

Baby bottle tooth decay occurs when a baby's teeth are exposed to sweet liquids for long periods of time. Allowing your baby to nurse throughout the night or giving them a bottle while they sleep is the main cause. The decay occurs when milk, formula, juice, and other sweetened liquids are left clinging to the teeth all night, providing a source of food to cavity-causing germs. The longer this continues, the worse the damage, making it very expensive to treat.

### 5. How can I prevent baby bottle tooth decay?

To prevent tooth decay, never allow your child to fall asleep with a bottle containing milk, formula, fruit juice or sweet liquids. If your baby wants a bottle at bedtime or during naps, give them a pacifier or a bottle filled with cool water. If you use a pacifier, use a clean one. Never give a baby a pacifier dipped in sugar or honey.

### 6. Do I need to clean my baby's mouth if there are no teeth yet?

Yes. Starting at birth, clean your baby's gums everyday using water and a clean, damp, soft washcloth or infant toothbrush, especially after every feeding. You are forming health habits for your children that will last a lifetime, and your baby will grow accustomed to having a clean and healthy mouth.

### 7. What do I do once teeth begin to appear?

As soon as your baby's teeth start to show, begin gently brushing them with a soft infant toothbrush and water. Toothpaste should not be used until age 2 unless your dentist recommends it. When the teeth start to touch each other, begin flossing between them daily. Practicing good oral hygiene with your child will help prevent oral disease.

### 8. Do baby teeth really matter? Won't they just fall out anyway?

Yes. Primary, or "baby," teeth are crucial for an infant who will soon be chewing food and talking. Healthy baby teeth help children speak clearly, chew naturally, and have a bright, beautiful smile! They are also placeholders for adult teeth, many of which may not come in for 10 to 12 years. If there is tooth decay in baby teeth, it can easily spread to permanent teeth when the child grows up.

### 9. When should I take my child to the dentist for the first time? How often?

You should take your baby to the dentist no later than their first birthday for a preventive check-up and take them once every six months after that. The dentist will evaluate your baby's risk for tooth decay and answer any questions you have about brushing, flossing, and proper feeding practices. Good, consistent early dental visits will help your baby grow up to be comfortable at dental visits.

### 10. Besides cleaning and brushing my baby's teeth, what else can I do?

Check your baby's teeth often -- at least once a month. Lift the lip and look for white spots on the teeth or changes to the gums. If you notice anything unusual, see a dentist immediately.

**Dr. Soledad Razuri**

As a pediatric dentist for more than 10 years, Dr. Razuri sees the pain caused by early childhood dental decay on a daily basis. With a cavity rate among Arizona children that is three times the national average, she has seen patients as young as two years old in need of root canals and extractions. "It breaks my heart," says Razuri, who practices in Scottsdale. "These children can't express the pain they feel, and their dental problems put quite a stress on the parents as well." With poor oral health contributing to problems with nutrition, speech development, and self-esteem, Dr. Razuri wants parents to know that in the long-run, it is cheaper, easier and wiser to take your child to the dentist for a preventative check up by age one.

**Dr. William Heimann**

Dr. Heimann has been a pediatric dentist in the Valley for nearly three decades. Since he started his private practice, the Phoenix-based dentist has seen an alarming increase in tooth decay among preschool children. "Families need to be aware that decay can start at a very young age," says Heimann, who has treated oral health issues in children as young as 15 months old. "Early prevention is key. There is still the misconception that baby teeth aren't important. Nothing could be farther from the truth." If there is one thing Dr. Heimann wants Arizona parents to know, it is that poor oral health negatively impacts a child's overall well-being on many levels, and that visiting a dentist isn't as difficult as many people believe.

**Fabiola Villalobos**

As a parent of a 3-year-old boy, Fabiola Villalobos knows the importance of early childhood dental visits. When her son Jose was only two and half years old, she noticed he was having difficulty eating and pieces of his baby teeth began to fall off. Worse yet, she could tell he was in pain – a heartbreaking situation for a parent. She immediately contacted a dentist, who reviewed Jose and treated his tooth decay. Since then, Fabiola reports that Jose is pain free and in good health. Fabiola wants other parents to know how important it is to take their children to a dentist at a young age, and she hopes others will learn from Jose's situation.

**Tychelle Smith**

Tychelle learned first-hand the importance of early childhood dental visits when she noticed her 2-year-old daughter Tya was experiencing pain while eating and brushing her teeth. Without fluoride in the water where they used to live, Tychelle says the decay in Tya's mouth was rapid and extensive, and her teeth were becoming discolored. Tya had her teeth pulled, filled and capped to repair the damage, and she also began a fluoride treatment to prevent future decay. Since then, things have gotten much better for Tya. "I used to have to force her to brush her teeth because of the pain it caused, but now it is something she enjoys," says Tychelle, who noticed a difference in Tya's demeanor almost immediately after treatment. "As soon as she got the work done, she was totally different. She was just happier in general." Tychelle wants parents to learn from her situation. "The earlier, the better" when it comes to dental visits, Tychelle reminds parents, and she stresses that oral health issues like Tya's can appear at a moment's notice.

## 5 Ways to Keep Your Mouth Healthy for Your Baby:

1. Brush your teeth twice daily (morning and night) with fluoride toothpaste.
2. Floss daily.
3. Limit your intake of high sugar food and beverages, including soda, sports drinks.
4. Have any tooth decay treated right away.
5. Go to the dentist regularly -- about once every 6 months as recommended by you dentist.

The better your oral health is, the better your child's oral health will be. Babies do not have the germs that cause tooth decay when they are born and must get them from parents and other intimate caregivers.

Keeping your mouth healthy leaves fewer germs to pass to your baby.

For more info about proper pediatric dental care, visit [www.AZSmiles.org](http://www.AZSmiles.org).

## 7 Things Parents Can Do for Their Baby's Oral Health:

1. Never allow your baby to sleep with a bottle or sippy cup containing anything other than water. Tooth decay occurs when milk, formula, fruit juices or sweet liquids are left clinging to baby's teeth, providing a source of food to decay-causing germs.
2. Do not share spoons, pacifiers, or cups with your baby to avoid passing on any cavity-causing germs from your mouth.
3. Do not give your baby soda or sports drinks and limit fruit juices
4. Starting at birth, clean your baby's gums using water and a clean, damp, soft washcloth or infant toothbrush.
5. Brush your baby's teeth twice daily as soon as they come in and floss between them daily as soon as they start to touch.
6. Check your baby's teeth once a month for white or dark spots. If white or dark spots appear, see a dentist.
7. Take your baby to a dentist for a preventive check up no later than the first birthday and take them once every 6 months after that.

Your child's baby teeth are very important. Not only do they help them speak clearly, chew naturally, and have a good-looking smile, they also aid in guiding permanent teeth into place. If there is tooth decay in baby teeth, it can easily affect adult teeth when the child grows.

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