

## Infant Oral Health Information for Parents/Caregivers

**DID YOU KNOW** that baby teeth are important for proper chewing, speech, and normal development of the jaws as well as for a child's general health?

**DID YOU KNOW** that baby teeth play an important role in the development of a child's self-concept and self-esteem?

**DID YOU KNOW** that baby teeth serve to guide the erupting permanent teeth into proper position?

**DID YOU KNOW** that tooth decay is an infection which, if left untreated in baby teeth, can cause significant damage to the developing permanent teeth which lie directly beneath baby teeth?

**DID YOU KNOW** decay in baby teeth can cause the young child intense pain? The once-popular idea that disease in baby teeth does not cause pain is simply wrong.

As parents, one of our major goals and responsibilities is to assure that our children are healthy as they grow and develop. We are fortunate to be living in a time when many once-critical diseases have been virtually eliminated. Yet dental decay (caries) remains the most wide-spread disease affecting young children. This is most unfortunate, considering the fact that dental disease is almost 100% preventable.

Toddlers and even infants less than 12 months old can suffer from tooth decay. Many parents are unaware of this fact because they do not receive information about keeping their child's mouth clean and healthy, free of caries, until their child's first dental appointment. Unfortunately, the first dental appointment is often as late as three years of age or even worse, at school age. For many children this is too late---they already have rampant tooth decay.

Prevention of dental disease in young children requires that preventive steps be implemented much earlier, beginning no later than 12 months of age as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry since 1986. Given the fact that routines and habits are developed during infancy, that the infant derives significant pleasure from oral stimulation, and that the environment in the infant's mouth is ripe for the initiation of dental disease, it is imperative that parents become involved in the oral health of their children beginning in infancy.

In summary, the prevention of dental disease is possible if care is begun in infancy. Let us help you start your child on a lifetime of optimum oral health beginning shortly after birth.

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