

# Taking Care of Children's Teeth

## Why is childhood dental care important?


Tooth decay—also known as cavities—is the most common chronic disease among children in the United States. A cavity occurs when plaque, a soft sticky layer of bacteria, builds up on teeth and damages the tooth's surface. Cavities can cause pain, difficulty eating, and speech problems. Regular brushing, flossing, and visits to the dentist help prevent tooth decay.

## When should a child go to the dentist?



- Children should have their first dental screening by their **first birthday** because babies can get cavities as soon as they get teeth.
- After their first visit, children should visit the dentist every 6 months (**two times a year**).
- The dentist can:
  - show parents/guardians how to clean the child's teeth
  - explain how to handle habits like thumb sucking and pacifier use
  - remove plaque, apply fluoride (a protective coating painted onto the teeth), or apply sealants to prevent cavities.

## How much toothpaste should be used?

Age	How much toothpaste	How to clean
Before a child gets teeth	None	Wipe gums with a clean, damp cloth.
First teeth – 3 years	 Grain of rice-size smear of fluoride toothpaste	Brush child's teeth <b>two times a day</b> using a child-sized toothbrush with soft bristles.  Supervise children's brushing to ensure that they are using the right amount of toothpaste.
3-5 years	 Pea-size dot of fluoride toothpaste	Brush <b>two times a day</b> using a child-sized toothbrush with soft bristles. If children have teeth that touch, use <b>floss once a day</b> to clean between teeth.  Supervise children's brushing and remind them not to swallow toothpaste.

**A note for Child Care and Early Learning Centers:** The Washington Administrative Code (**WAC**) **110-300-0180** requires child care programs offer children developmentally appropriate tooth brushing activities at least once per day.

**Brush teeth TWICE a day** to remove plaque on the surfaces of teeth. Follow these steps:

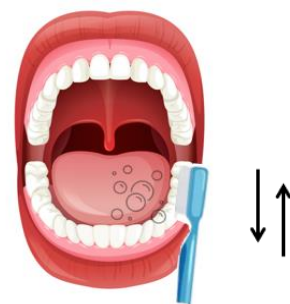
**1. Start on the insides of the teeth.**

- Use small circular motions.
- **Move around the mouth from left to the right.**
- Remember to brush the gums to remove plaque where the gums and teeth meet.



**2. Next, brush the biting surfaces of the back teeth (molars).**

- Use a back and forth motion.



**3. Brush the outsides of the teeth.**

- Use small circular motions.
- Move around the mouth from left to the right.
- Remember to brush the gums to remove plaque where the gums and teeth meet.



**4. Repeat steps 1 to 3 on TOP and BOTTOM teeth.**

**5. Brush the TONGUE to remove germs and bacteria.**



**Remember to floss teeth once a day!**

- You can use regular string floss or floss picks.
- Flossing removes plaque in the small spaces **between teeth** where the bristles of the toothbrush cannot reach.

