

# A Healthy Head Start

## February is Children's Dental Health Month

This month, we put our children on the path to excellent oral health. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) and the American Dental Association (ADA) recommend that all children be seen by a dentist when their first tooth appears or by age one. After that, regular checkups are important for maintaining dental health and, ultimately, overall health.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) reports that dental caries is the most prevalent chronic disease in our nation's children. More than 40 percent of children have caries by the time they reach kindergarten. In contrast to declining prevalence of dental caries among children in older age groups, the prevalence of caries in poor U.S. children under the age of five is increasing. This year, the ADA's campaign slogan is "Brush and clean in between to build a healthy smile." This is a perfect time to remind your pediatric patients the importance of brushing and flossing, along with proper techniques.

**"The prevalence of caries within the two to five-year-old age group among low-income families was 42 percent."<sup>2</sup>**

## Baby Bottle Tooth Syndrome

This condition is caused by using a baby bottle as a sleep aid. When a child falls asleep with a bottle of milk or juice, some of the liquid from the bottle stays behind the sleeping child's teeth. Recommending parents give water in their baby's bottle, if being used as a sleeping aid, can make a significant difference in the amount of Baby Bottle Tooth Syndrome you see in your office.<sup>3</sup>

## Fluoride

Infants and toddlers who do not receive an adequate amount of fluoride may be at an increased risk for tooth decay. Bottled water may not contain fluoride; therefore, children who regularly drink bottled water or tap water with suboptimal fluoride levels are missing the benefits of fluoride. Discuss your patient's fluoride needs with their caregiver if they live in an area where the community water or well water does not contain sufficient fluoride.

## Do it for the kids

Giving your kids a healthy head start will set them on the right path for dental hygiene. Remember, it's up to you, the parent, in the beginning, but once they're a little older they're going to rely on the good habits you instilled. We observe Children's Dental Health Month each February, but let's face it: we should be practicing and teaching good dental health habits year-round.

## How You Can Help:

Help by partnering with dentists to incorporate oral health screenings, risk assessment, fluoride varnish applications, anticipatory guidance, and dental referrals for treatment into your patients' well-child visits. This will help ensure that all children receive needed oral health care that is essential to their behavioral, speech, language, and overall growth and development. Use simple language and seek to improve parents' comprehension by using visual aids and verbal communication and techniques, such as questioning parents to confirm understanding of instructions and encouraging parents to ask questions.

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.aapd.org/resources/parent\\_resources/](http://www.aapd.org/resources/parent_resources/), accessed December 2018

<sup>2</sup><https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/b/baby-bottle-tooth-decay>, accessed December 2018

<sup>3</sup><https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/t/thumbsucking>, accessed December 2018

<sup>4</sup><https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/babies-and-kids/nutrition>, accessed December 2018

<sup>5</sup><https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/babies-and-kids/childrens-dental-health>, accessed December 2018

*Material discussed is meant for general informational purposes only and is not to be construed as medical advice. Although the information has been gathered from sources believed to be reliable, please note that individual situations can vary. You should always consult a licensed professional when making decisions concerning oral health care.*