To: News Media
From: Central Michigan District Health Department
RE: Children’s Dental Health
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Children’s Dental Health

Children’s National Dental Health Month is held in February to stress the importance of protecting children from tooth decay and gum disease. It is important to take an active role in your child’s dental health by going over the proper techniques for dental hygiene. Dental hygiene is the practice of keeping the mouth, teeth, and gums clean and healthy. By regular brushing, flossing, and visits to the dentist, oral diseases can be prevented.

Genetics play a large role in the timing and stages of tooth development. Infants often begin developing their teeth between the ages of three and six months. It is crucial to begin caring for their teeth at this point. If the mouth is not cared for properly, infants and children can develop tooth decay and gum disease at a very early age. If your child’s teeth are not coming in as early as expected, you may call your physician or dentist.

There are many steps a parent should take to properly care for their child’s teeth. It is important to avoid putting a baby to bed with a bottle; the sugar and acids in milk and juice can lead to tooth decay. An infant’s teeth can be cleaned with a soft cloth or gauze pad and warm water. Usually, primary care physicians will check a baby’s mouth as teeth come in to make sure they are healthy. Once a child turns a year old, you can begin brushing his or her teeth at least twice a day with a toothbrush and warm water.

Beginning at age two, toothpaste can be used in small amounts (the size of a small green pea). Toothpaste should not be swallowed in large amounts by children at this age. A child’s teeth can be flossed at least once a day as soon as the teeth touch each other. Flossing can reach the areas that a toothbrush may not. Parents usually have to help their child brush and floss his or her teeth until the age of five, or when they are able to do a good job on their own. Setting a timer in the bathroom may help ensure that a child is brushing for the suggested two minutes. Excitement, encouragement, positive reinforcement and continual monitoring will ensure your child enjoys their dental health.

Caring for your child’s teeth has many benefits, including: prevention of tooth decay and gum disease, saving money, prevention of bad breath, keeping teeth white by avoiding staining from food and drinks, and improvement of your child’s overall health. Regular dentist visits (twice a year) should begin in the early toddler and preschool years and last a lifetime. Many dentists encourage parents to bring children to the dentist by the age of three. If a child is having problems or pain before the age of three, set up an appointment at that time.

Many parents question whether to give their children fluoride supplements. Fluoride is a natural mineral found in rock, air, soil, and plants. It helps to protect against tooth decay, repairs weak spots that could develop into cavities, and reduces the amount of money that could be spent on possible dental repairs. Children could be getting the substantial amount of fluoride through tap

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Many communities add fluoride to their local water supplies. Supplements can be provided by your doctor if your area water does not contain the adequate amount.

Internet dental resources for children include:

- **American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry** ([www.aapd.org](http://www.aapd.org)) website features “24 brochures that address commonly asked questions with easy-to-understand answers and illustrations. The brochures are designed to aid communication between the dental team and parents and/or patients—or even potential patients.”

- **American Dental Association** ([www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org)) website includes “information and resources about various issues related to you and your family’s oral health care. Also visit the ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ section to learn more about your oral health.”

This article was provided to you by the staff at Central Michigan District Health Department, which serves the residents of Arenac, Clare, Gladwin, Isabella, Osceola, and Roscommon Counties.

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