

Patient information about children's oral health

The first baby teeth usually erupt when the child is 3-6 months but there is large individual variation. Some children have teeth very early and some very late. By the time the child turns 3 years old all 20 baby teeth have usually come through.

You should start brushing your child's baby teeth as soon as they come through. Use a fluoride tooth paste for young children with 1000ppm Fluoride until the child turns 3 or use a very small amount of adult toothpaste. If an adult toothpaste is used it's enough to just dip the brushes in the toothpaste. From the age of 3 a pea size adult toothpaste with 1450ppm Fluoride should be used.

The Department of Health recommends children from 3 years to have high level fluoride varnish applications at least twice yearly. This can be done by the regular dental examination.

It is advisable to bring children to see your dentist for regular examinations from they turn 1.

When the child turns 5-6 years old the new adult teeth start coming through. The first permanent molars appear behind the back-baby teeth. The front baby teeth are the first to become wobbly and fall out. The new adult incisors then follow.

All adult molars have fissures on the chewing surface. Some fissures can be really deep, and can be difficult to clean completely. If the fissures are deep it is advisable to have a fissure sealant of the chewing surface to avoid decay. Ask your dentist if it is recommended for your child.

Decay is caused by bacterial plaque formation on the tooth surfaces. If the bacteria are not frequently and sufficiently removed the bacteria start producing acid that break down the tooth structure causing holes to be formed.

The best way to avoid decay is by cleaning the teeth thoroughly twice daily for at least two minutes and not have too much sugar to eat or drink.

Children up to the age of 10 rarely have the dexterity and patience to brush their teeth properly and do enough plaque removal to avoid decay. It is therefore important that the parents do the brushing for them every day.

Disclosing tablets can be used to check if the brushing has been effective and are great to use when the child starts practicing their own brushing skills. Disclosing tablets stain the bacterial plaque and is used after brushing to show where bacterial plaque is still present. Disclosing tablets can be bought from the chemist or your dental practice.