

Dental Dateline

Roots of good oral health start with first visit

Dental Dateline is provided by your Chicago Dental Society member dentists. For more oral health information, visit www.cds.org.



According to a recent study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, oral health is improving for most Americans, but tooth decay among pre-school children is on the rise. The study found that tooth decay in primary teeth (also called baby teeth) in children ages 2 to 5 increased from 24 percent to 28 percent between 1988-1994 and 1999-2004. Those troubling statistics are all the more reason to make your child's first visit with the dentist a priority.

Scheduling the first visit

Most parents would never dream of missing or postponing a routine visit with their child's pediatrician. But many parents often wait too long to plan their child's first trip to the dentist. So when is the best time to begin scheduling regular dental

appointments for your child?

Dentists recommend that a child's first dental visit should occur shortly after their first tooth appears and no later than the child's first birthday.

First time's the charm

The "first tooth visit" is critical in establishing a lifetime of good oral health because it allows the dentist to check for proper development; evaluate any negative habits, such as thumb sucking or tongue thrusting; help the parents develop good oral hygiene practices for their children; and detect early signs of tooth decay. According to the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, tooth decay can have serious implications for a child's long-term health and well being, even in the earliest stages. A study by the Children's Dental Health Project found that children who have their first preventative dental visit by age 1 are not only less likely to need restorative work or visit emergency rooms, but their average dental costs are almost 40 percent lower in their first five years than children who receive their first exam after their first birthday. Early dental visits are also important because they preserve the child's primary teeth. Your child's primary teeth are just as important as their permanent adult teeth because they perform essential roles in helping your child chew and speak and serving as placeholders in the jaw for the permanent teeth.

A good foundation

Ultimately, the sooner your child visits a dentist for preventative care the more likely it is that their first, and subsequent, visits with the dentist will be positive ones—laying the groundwork for a lifetime of good oral health. For more information on your child's first visit or dental care tips for children, consult your dentist. ■

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