

First Screening **1st** by your **1st** Birthday!

By Dr. Jennifer Caserta, MD, FAAP in cooperation with the Washington Dental Service Foundation

Some parents think baby teeth don't matter because they fall out. But healthy baby teeth are critical for infants, who will soon be learning to eat solid foods and talk. Baby teeth also guide permanent teeth into place. By age one children should have their teeth screened by a dentist or physician.

Oral health is critical to overall health and early learning. Increasingly, families are learning about oral health during well-child visits at their child's medical office. As primary care medical providers see very young children often at these visits, they are in an ideal position to deliver preventive oral health services.

TOOTH TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Beginning at birth, wipe your baby's gums with a washcloth or piece of gauze after feeding.
- As soon as you see baby's first tooth, start brushing it with a soft "baby" toothbrush.
- Use a small amount (about the size of a grain of rice) of fluoridated toothpaste. Try putting your child's head in your lap to make brushing easier.
- Avoid constant snacking on sugary, sticky or starchy foods or sipping sweet liquids throughout the day.
- Ask your child's dentist or primary care provider about fluoride varnish, which is painted on the teeth to prevent or heal early decay.
- If you put your baby to bed with a bottle, fill it with water. Formula, milk, or juice can increase your child's risk of cavities.
- Make sure your child gets their first oral health screening by their first birthday by their dentist or physician.

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The nonprofit Washington Dental Service Foundation has launched a campaign to draw attention to the importance of baby teeth and early intervention. For more information, go to KidsOralHealth.org.