



## What is Early Childhood Caries?

Early Childhood Caries is tooth decay (or a cavity) in children five years or younger. It may look like holes in the teeth, white spots, dark pits, or broken teeth. Tooth decay can be painful and make it hard for your child to eat.



## What causes tooth decay?

Tooth decay is caused by harmful germs that feed on sugar in foods and drinks. The germs make acids that dissolve the outer layer of the tooth, forming a cavity.

## Are baby teeth important?

Baby teeth are needed for chewing food, proper speech, and to hold the space for adult teeth. If baby teeth are lost too early, the adult teeth can come in crooked. Take your child to the dentist when the first tooth appears, or no later than their first birthday. Early visits are key to your child's future dental health.

## How you can protect your child's teeth:

- Start a healthy habit – don't put your baby to bed with a bottle.
- Give only breast milk, formula, or water in a bottle.
- Use a clean pacifier (no honey or sugar on it).
- Between six to nine months old, your child should begin to drink from a cup. Wean baby from the bottle by age one.
- Germs that help cause tooth decay may pass to your child's mouth when you share food, spoons or lick the pacifier. Don't share germs.
- Limit sugar (sweet, sticky snacks, foods, and drinks).
- Wipe your baby's gums and teeth after each feeding and at bedtime with a clean washcloth or use a soft, infant toothbrush.
- Unless it's mealtime, sippy cups should be for water only.
- Brush teeth twice a day. Use a small smear of fluoride toothpaste, about the size of a grain of rice.
- Fluoride helps prevent tooth decay. Give your child water containing fluoride. Ask your dentist or doctor if your tap water has enough fluoride (Note: not every public water system puts fluoride in its water).