

Early Childhood Tooth Decay



Region of Waterloo
PUBLIC HEALTH AND
EMERGENCY SERVICES

The path to healthy teeth and gums starts very early in life. Baby teeth are important for eating, speaking and socializing. Baby teeth act as guides for permanent teeth—if they are lost too soon, the result could be crooked permanent teeth.

What is Early Childhood Tooth Decay (ECTD)?

ECTD is tooth decay or cavities which can occur in very young children. It can destroy baby teeth and cause pain, infection, crooked permanent teeth and risk of decay in permanent teeth. The treatment at the dentist can cost thousands of dollars and could require your young child to have treatment done under a general anaesthetic.

What causes ECTD?

ECTD is caused by too much sugar in the diet and poor brushing habits or no brushing at all. It is caused by long periods of time where a baby's teeth are in contact with any type of liquid (milk, juice) besides water. When a liquid sits in the mouth, such as during sleep, the sugar in the liquid is digested and broken down into acid by germs in the mouth. This acid starts to dissolve the teeth. The upper front teeth are most often affected.

Bacteria + Sugar + Tooth = Decay

What are the symptoms of ECTD?

ECTD first appears as white spots on the upper front teeth. A child should be seen by a dentist or dental hygienist by his or her first year of age. Contact Region of Waterloo Public Health and Emergency Services Dental Program at 519-575-4400 if you cannot afford to pay the dentist, or for more information.

Stage 1

Very Early Decay



White chalky areas around the gumline. **It can be reversed, if found early.**

Stage 2

Decay



Brown areas or decayed spots along gumline. **Requires dental treatment.**

Stage 3

Severe Decay



Spots continue to expand and tooth structure can be lost. **Can result in tooth loss.**

How to Prevent ECTD



Always hold your baby while feeding.

Breast milk is the only natural food for infants.

Never put your baby to bed with a bottle.



Begin cleaning baby's teeth as soon as they appear in the mouth.



Children should be seen by a dentist or dental hygienist by their first birthday.

Dental Care Tips

Start oral health care before your baby has teeth. Clean your baby's gums after each feeding with a clean wet baby washcloth. Switch to a baby toothbrush when four to six teeth appear in the mouth.

Children's teeth should be brushed by an adult two times a day for two minutes. Continue with supervision until your child can properly reach all areas of the mouth on their own.

Never use syrup, honey or sweeteners on a pacifier. Do not put your baby's soother or spoon in your mouth. The bacteria that cause tooth decay can spread through saliva.

"Lift the lip"

Babies and toddlers can get cavities. Check your child's teeth daily while brushing. **Lift the upper lip** to see the teeth right up to the gumline. If they look chalky, have white or brown spots or are chipped, take your child to a dental professional.

By 12 to 14 months, children should drink mostly from a cup at mealtimes in their highchair. Do **not** let a child walk around all day with a "sippy" cup.

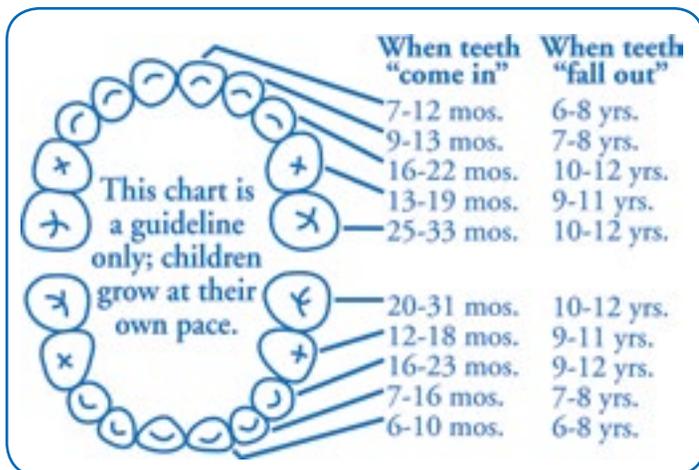
Frequent snacks, especially if sticky or sweet, may cause cavities. Examples of healthy choices include: cheese, unsweetened yogurt, fruits and vegetables.

ECTD can be prevented by starting good brushing habits early in life and eating healthy foods.

Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or contact Region of Waterloo Public Health and Emergency Services at 519-575-4400.

When will my baby's teeth start to come in?



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Region of Waterloo Public Health and Emergency Services

Dental Health
519-575-4400