

Pediatric Dental Tips in the Time of Quarantine

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It is hard to see the benefits of being quarantined inside your house for weeks or months at a time, but according to Albert Einstein, every crisis is an opportunity for education and innovation. As we find new ways to entertain our homeschooled children, working on improving their oral health can be a great way to start reinforcing good habits.

Preventative Home Care

When should I start brushing my baby's teeth? Good habits should form from the first day of life. Wipe your baby's gums with washcloths after feedings. Offer your toddler a small sip of water to cleanse the mouth. As soon as the first tooth erupts in your child's mouth, it's your job to start cleaning his or her mouth twice a day. Brush your child's teeth with soft-bristle toothbrush and water or using minimal amount of children's fluoride toothpaste.

When is my child old enough to brush their teeth on their own? As soon as your child is eager to do it on, let them take charge of brushing their teeth as part of their morning routine, but continue to brush their teeth at night before bedtime. When observed, most children will try to imitate you as early as 2 years old, but they will not have the fine motor skills or the skills to reach all their teeth until their pre-teen or teenage years. Every child is different, think about your help as their training wheels and only remove when your child is ready and more likely to succeed.

When should I start flossing my child's teeth? As soon as two teeth touch side by side, flossers are key. Chicken or fruit fibers often get stuck between your children's teeth and they will appreciate you removing that discomfort and learn to value flossing early on.

Remember, baby teeth may be temporary and will fall out, but the skills of cavity and gum disease prevention that your child learns, while maintaining their healthy smile during those first 10 years of their life, will last by preventing disease and breakdown of their adult teeth for a lifetime.

Signs of Emergency Care Needed

Tooth cavities are holes in the teeth caused by combination of our genetics, diet and bacteria in our mouth. It is a form of infection that starts as an innocent food packing in the grooves and in between our teeth, then turns into acid softening our teeth to create a perfect home for "sugar bugs to create their cave-like homes in our chewing blocks". Like termites in a tree, the bacteria in our mouth can break the strong foundation of our teeth or ruin the bone around our teeth to make them loose and eventually fall out. But the enemy, just like COVID-19 isn't visible to our eyes and often the damage is already too extensive to repair once we can see or feel it.

What are the early signs of a cavity? Dark spot on the tooth that over time becomes sensitive to cold foods.

What are the early signs of infection? A crack or a hole in the tooth will cause the tooth to become more sensitive to cold, hot, sweets, and eventually lead to pain. Then, the tooth may spontaneously stop hurting for a period of time until the infection starts inside the tooth, then spreads to the bone and the cheeks.

Additional Dental Tips for You and Your Child

-If you see any bump on the gum (like a pimple) or a puffy, swollen cheek, take the child to the dentist immediately. If the swelling causes the child to have difficulty breathing, swallowing, or have a general look of weakness along with a fever, take your child to the nearest Emergency Room. As a parent, you never want to underestimate how a simple toothache, can cost your child his or her life.

-It's very important to note, that even if the pain went away, you must keep the appointment with your dentist to evaluate and treat the problem.

-As teeth may not seem a priority during a pandemic, as they seem replaceable; life is not. Teeth are in our head, just like our brain, and infection so near to our bodies' control center can have devastating results, so please brush and floss, and always take your child's complaint(s) of a toothache, seriously.

Community Health Centers has immediate appointments for dental emergencies at the following locations: Apopka, Winter Garden, Forest City, Meadow Woods, Pine Hills, Lake Ellenor, Tavares, Leesburg, and Groveland. Team members are available to provide Dental Emergency and Urgent Care - evaluation and treatment of the dental infection, swelling and/or pain in patients of all ages. To schedule an appointment, please call 407-905-8827 or 352-314-7400.

About Community Health Centers, Inc.

Community Health Centers, Inc. (CHC), a Federally Qualified Health Center, provides quality and compassionate primary healthcare services to insured, uninsured, underinsured, and underserved children and adults within Central Florida. CHC provides care to more than 66,000 patients, each year, in the Apopka, Bithlo, Clermont, Forest City, Groveland, Lake Ellenor, Leesburg, Meadow Woods, Pine Hills, Tavares and Winter Garden communities. www.chcfl.org