



NEWS RELEASE

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Parents should brush up on healthy teeth: simple steps for kids' smiles

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Every parent knows that a healthy smile is a sign of a happy child, and oral health experts agree that creating those healthy smiles begins in infancy. In observation of February as National Children's Dental Health Month, experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have produced a set of pediatric oral health tips, *Brush Up on Healthy Teeth: Simple Steps for Kids' Smiles*. This is available on the CDC Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/OralHealth/factsheets/brushup.htm>.

The simple steps assist parents in taking care of their children's teeth as well as aid in teaching proper dental habits. Proper dental health practices such as drinking fluoridated water and brushing with a "pea-sized" amount of fluoride toothpaste can greatly improve oral health in children. Fluoride works by stopping or even reversing tooth decay. Research has shown that brushing with toothpaste that contains fluoride lowers the risk of decay by 15 to 30 percent, and drinking fluoridated water lowers the risk by 18 to 40 percent.

"Beginning oral health care in infancy, along with the proper use of fluoride, reduces the risk of tooth decay and improves overall health," said Dr. Stuart Lockwood, director of the Oral Health Branch at the Alabama Department of Public Health. "There are effective measures that parents can take that are safe, effective and simple, but it's important that parents understand oral health and begin early."

The CDC recommends the following *Simple Steps for Kids' Smiles*:

1. Start cleaning teeth early.

As the first tooth appears, begin cleaning by wiping with a clean, damp cloth every day. When more teeth come in, switch to a small, soft toothbrush. Begin using toothpaste with fluoride when the child is 2 years old. Use toothpaste with fluoride earlier if your child's doctor or dentist recommends it.

2. Use the right amount of fluoride toothpaste.

Fluoride is important in fighting cavities. But if children younger than 6 years swallow too much fluoride, their teeth may have white spots. To keep this from happening, use only a small amount of toothpaste (about the size of a pea). Teach your child to spit out the toothpaste and to rinse well after brushing.

3. Supervise brushing.

Brush your child's teeth twice a day until your child has the skill to handle the toothbrush alone. Then, continue to closely watch brushing to make sure your child is doing a thorough job and using only a small amount of toothpaste.

4. Talk to your child's doctor or dentist.

Check with the doctor or dentist about your child's specific fluoride needs. After age 2, most children get the right amount of fluoride to help prevent cavities if they drink water that contains fluoride and brush their teeth with a pea-size amount of fluoride toothpaste twice a day.

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