



EARLY CHILDHOOD CARIES

What is Early Childhood Caries?

Early Childhood Caries (ECC) is tooth decay that occurs in children under six years old, most commonly affecting the upper front teeth and then the primary molars. This decay often develops when teeth are exposed to sugary foods and beverages for long periods, such as going to bed with a bottle or frequently sipping beverages other than water during the day.

Our mouths naturally contain many types of bacteria that live on the teeth, gums, tongue, and other areas. While some bacteria are helpful, others can cause tooth decay. If you have cavities, the bacteria that cause them are in your mouth. Parents or caregivers can unintentionally pass these bacteria, increasing children's risk of developing tooth decay.

Protecting Your Teeth with Fluoride

Fluoride helps prevent tooth decay by making the tooth more resistant to acid attacks from plaque bacteria and sugars in the mouth. To help prevent tooth decay, it is recommended children use a fluoridated toothpaste.

Here are some helpful tips to ensure your child receives the appropriate amount of fluoride:

- Children up to 3 years of age need only a smear, **the size of a grain of rice.**
- Children 3 years of age and older need only a small amount, **the size of a small green pea.**
- Teach your child to **spit out any excess toothpaste** to minimize swallowing.
- Avoid rinsing with water after brushing for optimal fluoride uptake.

