

"Help your child start healthy dental habits early."

Cavities and tooth decay in children highlighted in pediatric dental report from AAPD

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(dailyRx News) [Do children need to see a dentist before they turn 1 year old? Yes.](#), says the group behind a new report, though many parents might not realize this.

According to a new report from the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD), tooth decay is a common problem in children and is an issue that's growing.

AAPD suggested that delays in children's first dental visit might be contributing to the problem.

This report, released January 28 and titled the "State of Little Teeth Report," looked at a variety of data sources and studies and concluded that caries, also called cavities or tooth decay, is on the rise in children.

AAPD explained that caries is a common chronic disease that can be transmitted by bacteria in saliva. When caries occurs in very young children (called early childhood caries or ECC), the decay can be especially quick, AAPD explained.

The report found that the rate of tooth decay in the baby teeth of children between the ages of 2 and 5 increased almost 17 percent from 1988-1994 to 1999-2004.

In the most recent available data, it was estimated that [by the age of 3, between 5 to 10 percent of US children will have had tooth decay](#), a number which increases to about 60 percent by age 5.

The tooth decay problem seemed to be worse among children living in poverty. According to the report, impoverished children between ages 2 and 9 were twice as likely to have tooth decay than their peers in other economic groups, and the decay was more likely to go untreated.

AAPD stressed that untreated tooth decay can lead to further infection and, in some cases, hospitalization.

"One of the key reasons a preventable disease, like caries, is becoming an increasingly significant threat to the health, welfare and future of the youngest members of our society is that children are not seeing the dentist early enough," reported AAPD.

According to AAPD, it is recommended that children get their first dental exam when their first tooth appears (which usually happens between ages 6 and 12 months old), and that the first exam is recommended no later than when the child is one year old.

In an online survey of 1,000 US parents with children aged 5 or younger, 60 percent reported thinking it was important to take children to the dentist before age one, but only 25 percent reported actually doing so.

The report cited other studies, including one national survey which estimated that only 16 percent of parents took their child to the dentist prior to age 2.

"The early dental visit, combined with good dental habits and dietary practices, can slow or even reverse the caries epidemic among our children," explained AAPD. "The goals of an early visit are to establish a dental home for the infant, introduce healthy habits and prevent early childhood caries."

In an interview with dailyRx News, Dana Fort, DDS, a dentist with private practices in Illinois, seconded the notion of getting an early start on oral health and highlighted some of the many ways parents can help prevent cavities in children.

"Good oral health starts early," said Dr. Fort. "Avoid putting baby to bed with a bottle, especially one containing juice or milk, as the sugars present in these drinks can cause cavities. If a baby must take a bottle at bedtime, it's best to give it plain water."

Dr. Fort recommended the daily cleaning of infants' gums with a wet washcloth until teeth appear, at which point they should be brushed.

"Parents should supervise tooth brushing until a child can develop sufficient hand eye coordination to brush independently — often around age 7," said Dr. Fort, who noted that a timer can help kids brush their teeth for a full two minutes.

"Since cavities are a communicable disease, it's best to teach children not to get into the habit of sharing utensils or cups with others," Dr. Fort also suggested.

For older kids, Dr. Fort recommended avoiding drinks like sodas and sports drinks, which can contribute to tooth decay.

"For teens, chewing sugar free gum actually prevents cavities as it stimulates the production of cavity fighting saliva," said Dr. Fort. "Many sugar free gums also contain xylitol, a sugar known to kill cavity-causing bacteria."

The online survey of parents used in the "State of Little Teeth Report" was designed and executed by a company called KRC Research for AAPD.