
Baby Bottle Tooth Decay/Early Childhood Caries

Description: Baby Bottle Tooth Decay (or nursing bottle mouth)/Early childhood caries (ECC) is a leading dental problem for children under 3 years of age. Baby bottle tooth decay/ECC occurs when a child's teeth are exposed to sugary liquids such as formula, fruit juices and other sweetened liquids, for a continuous, extended period of time. The practice of putting a baby to bed with a bottle, which the baby can suck on for hours, is the major cause of this dental condition. According to child care licensing rules, a baby cannot be placed in a crib with a bottle or have a bottle propped during feeding. The sugary liquid flows over the baby's upper front teeth and dissolves the enamel, causing decay that can lead to infection. The longer the practice continues, the greater the damage to the baby's teeth and mouth. Treatment is very expensive.

Responsibilities of Parents and Caregivers: The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry has developed the following guidelines for preventing baby bottle tooth decay/ECC:

- Don't allow a child to fall asleep with a bottle containing milk, formula, fruit juices or other sweet liquids.
- Never let a child walk with a bottle in her mouth.
- Comfort a child who wants a bottle between regular feedings or during naps with a bottle filled with cool water.
- Always make sure a child's pacifier is clean and never dip a pacifier in a sweet liquid.
- Introduce children to a cup as they approach 1 year of age. Children should stop drinking from a bottle soon after their 1st birthday.
- Notify the parent of any unusual red or swollen areas in a child's mouth or any dark spot on a child's tooth so the parent can consult the child's dentist.
- To prevent infections from spreading through germs found in saliva and blood on toothbrushes, see Using and Handling Toothbrushes.