



# COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: Children's Oral Health

**Engaging parents in their child's oral health.** The Community of Practice (CoP) series was developed through a partnership with IMPACT WV and the WV Home Visiting Program to help participants exchange technical information and share experiences about serving clients currently experiencing or who have past experiences with substance use and neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS).

**The information in this IMPACT WV product was taken from a Community of Practice (CoP) presentation by Dr. Dami Kim, Assistant Professor at WVU School of Dentistry Department of Pediatric Dentistry, and Gina Sharps, MPH, RDH, CTTS, Coordinator with the West Virginia Oral Health Coalition.**

## Aim

The purpose of this Community of Practice is to:

- Raise awareness of oral health in the context of general health
- Provide a brief overview of oral health issues
- Describe ways to promote oral health at home
- Discuss when to schedule oral health visits, including preventative oral health care
- Explore community-based oral health resources



## General Info

Dental health relates to an individual's teeth or gums; however, oral health is related to everything involved in your mouth. When in office, dentists may refer to this as the "health of your mouth". This can be your jaw, chewing muscles, roof of mouth, linings of mouth, teeth, tongue, lips, salivary glands, mouth and face pain, oral and throat cancer. Research has shown there is a link between mouth infections and serious medical conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, oral cancer or stroke. Keeping a healthy mouth may influence the other health conditions one experiences. While taking care of our mouth helps keep the rest of our body physically healthy, it also impacts quality of life.

The following factors related to oral health are essential to quality of life:

- Biting
- Chewing
- Smiling
- Speaking
- Psychosocial wellbeing

Baby teeth set the foundation for oral health. As we grow, our baby teeth allow us to chew food, pronounce words, hold a spot for our permanent teeth, develop facial structures, create positive self-esteem and ensure our overall health. Many times professionals hear, "They are just going to fall out, why take care of them". The following are ways in which we can transmit harmful bacteria:

- Bacteria is primarily transmitted from mother/caregiver to infant through:
  - Sharing utensils
  - Cleaning pacifiers by mouth
  - Pre-chewing food
  - Sharing toothbrushes
  - Putting your hands in your baby's mouth

\*The first two years of a child's life are the largest opportunity for infections. The earlier the child is infected, the higher the risk for cavities.



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## Effects of Decay:

Dental health problems can result in hours lost from school, costly dental treatments and hospital-based medical and surgical treatments. The following effects are related to tooth decay in children:

- Extreme pain
- Spread of infection
- Difficulty chewing
- Nutrition
- Costly dental treatment
- Additional decay and permanent dentition
- Missed school days
- Impaired speech development
- Inability to concentrate
- Reduced self-esteem



## MITIGATE RISK:

There are multiple ways you can help prevent tooth decay. The following are a list of options providers and parents may engage to help children learn to care for their oral health.

- Teach children about the importance of oral health
- Serve children healthy food options
- Clean infants' gums with a cloth or a small toothbrush
- Brush with fluoride toothpaste once teeth appear
- Check for fluoride in drinking water
- Check child's mouth often
- Obtain preventive oral health care (fluoride varnish)

### During Pregnancy:

During pregnancy mothers can begin the early process to positive oral care. Start by receiving oral care and visiting with a dentist regularly. As recommended, brush your teeth twice daily with fluoride toothpaste. Avoid eating foods that are unhealthy and can leave harmful residue on your teeth. Finally, be sure to remove breast milk or formula from the baby's teeth with a cloth or a small toothbrush after feeding. Residue remains for the entirety of the day, and the more food sits on your infants/toddlers' teeth, the more likely they are to develop cavities.

### During Feeding:

Children may be introduced to juice around 12 months of age. Not only does age matter, but the amount of juice the child drinks matters. It is recommended juice only be served in 4 to 6 ounces per day for this age range, as well as only serving at set mealtimes. When incorporating juice, be sure that your child is also drinking plenty of water. Food is recommended to be served at set times throughout the day. Remove using food as a reward for good behavior. Grazing and adding in foods not scheduled throughout the day increased the child's likelihood of getting cavities and avoid dipping pacifiers in sweetened foods such as sugar or honey.



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## MITIGATE RISK:



### Brushing Teeth at Home:

- Younger children: knee to knee or baby burrito for oral hygiene
- Older children: stay behind the child for good visualization and easy arm movements

### Tooth brushing

#### Recommendations:

- Use soft-bristled age-appropriate brush
- Toothpaste size:
  - Smear for children under 3 years of age
  - Pea size for children ages 3 to 6
- Brush two times a day, spit toothpaste (don't rinse)
- Supervise cleanings until age 7 or 8

### Checking inside the child's mouth:

Parents and providers can help prevent tooth decay by looking for the early signs of decay.

- Early stages: look for white chalky lines and use fluoride to prevent cavities
- Moderate stages: look for brown or white holes. Teeth may appear as they are melting away. Treatment is required at this point.
- Severe stages: large holes, broken teeth, abscesses and pain. This requires extensive treatment.

### Adult Dental Benefits:

Active as of January 2021, a new benefit allows for preventative and restorative services, capping at \$1,000 year. This is for eligible adults 21 and older under West Virginia Medicaid Managed Care Organization's (MCO): The Health Plan, Aetna and Unicare.





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## TIPS

- Dental home should be established at the time the first tooth emerges and no later than 1 year of age.
- Dental visits should occur before the age of one.
- Prepare your child for the dental visit. This can be reading a story, doing arts and crafts, etc.
- Avoid using words such as “shot”, “drill” or “hurt”.
- Providers should lift the lip when performing check-ups to detect the early signs of tooth decay.
- Supervise your child's brushing until the age of seven or eight.
- Brush twice a day with fluoride.
- Use a smear of toothpaste for children under 3 years of age, and a pea size for children 3 to 6 years of age.
- Talk to your provider about fluoride varnish and effects in preventing tooth decay on baby and permanent teeth.

## RESOURCES

### **WV Medicaid Provider Directory:**

<https://www.wvmmis.com/MhpViewer.aspx?auth=0&Url=https://www.wvmmis.com/MyHealthPAS/Provider/Pages/ProviderDirectory.aspx>

**West Virginia Oral Health Coalition:** <https://wvohc.org/resources/>

**Substance Use Recovery Grant under the Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation:**  
<https://tgkvf.org/>

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES:

- Community clinics
- Dental schools
- Health department
- Training programs
- Volunteer clinics
- Mobile dental programs
- Private practice
- Free clinics
- Federally qualified centers