Dental Health

When Teeth Grow:

Children start to get their first set of "baby teeth" between 6 to 12 months of age. Usually by age 3 years, all 20 baby teeth are in the mouth. Around age 5, your child will start to lose his first baby teeth (usually the lower front teeth). At the same time, he will start to get permanent molars behind the last baby tooth in the back of his mouth. Between the ages of 5 to 14 years, your child will lose all 20 baby teeth. These teeth will be replaced by 20 permanent teeth. As an adult, your child will have 32 teeth, including 4 "wisdom teeth".

Keeping Teeth Clean:

Birth to One Year:
Dental care should begin very early, even before you see your baby’s first tooth. Wipe your baby’s gums gently with a damp wash cloth once a day. When teeth start to come in, use a small soft bristle toothbrush. You may begin using a very small amount of toothpaste with fluoride when your child will not swallow the toothpaste. Be sure to have your child rinse his mouth well and not swallow the toothpaste.

After One Year:
Brush teeth twice a day – morning and night. Children need to learn to brush their own teeth, but they will need help until they are about 5-7 years old. Make sure your child is brushing all of his teeth, especially the back teeth. It is hard for a child to handle a toothbrush well enough to brush every tooth until age 5 to 7. Flossing will be taught when the dentist feels it is appropriate.

When to See the Dentist:

Your child should begin to have his teeth and mouth evaluated about 12 months of age or about 6 months after the first tooth erupts. He should see the dentist about every 6 months for the rest of his life. There are a lot of things that the dentist can do to help keep your child’s teeth healthy. It is better for your child to have regular dental visits than to only see the dentist for emergencies. Let your dentist know if your child has special medical needs that may require special attention, such as a heart murmur.

Healthy Teeth:

Cavities are caused by sugar and bacteria in the mouth. Limit snacks high in sugar. Do not put sugar, pop or sweetened drinks, such as juice or Kool-Aid® in your baby’s bottle. Give your child healthy snacks, such as fresh fruit and vegetables.

If your baby stays on the bottle past 12 months of age or if you let your baby suck on a bottle while lying down, your baby is at risk for early childhood caries (tooth decay.) This decay affects your baby’s front and back teeth. To avoid the risk of tooth decay, simply take away your baby’s bottle as soon as your baby is done drinking from it and clean his teeth frequently with a soft toothbrush or cloth. Also, don’t let your baby suck on a bottle for long periods of time.
Injuries to Teeth:

Your child should wear a mouth guard that is molded to fit his mouth when he plays sports. This includes bicycle riding, roller blading and hockey. Your dentist can make a custom guard or you can buy one at a sporting goods store.

If your child’s tooth is knocked out or a piece breaks off, stay calm. If a permanent tooth is damaged, try to find the tooth or the piece. Place it in milk or your child’s saliva (spit). Place light pressure on the bleeding and take the child to the emergency room or dentist office. Bring the tooth to the office/emergency room. It is important to do this as quickly as possible. If a baby tooth is knocked out, the dentist will need to look at your child’s mouth to be sure there are no problems, but baby teeth do not need to be put back in. If your child passes out after an accident, take him to the Emergency Room or call 911 immediately.

Call your child’s dentist or the Children’s Mercy Hospital Information Line at (816) 234-3188 if:

- Your child complains of tooth pain.
- Your child complains of tooth pain and has a fever over 101° F (38.3° C).
- Your child has had an injury to his mouth or teeth.