

Standard 2

Oral Health

Encourage parents and caregivers to introduce a tooth brushing routine appropriate for every member of the family (parents, infants and children).

Why is this Standard important?

Tooth decay is an infectious disease and a serious problem among young children, especially in Arizona. One in every three children has had tooth decay by his or her third birthday. Tooth decay, if left untreated, can cause health problems and can affect learning, speech and eating. Children are often unable to communicate their dental pain. A child experiencing dental pain may demonstrate its effects through anxiety, fatigue, irritability and withdrawal from normal activities.

Help Families Implement a Tooth Brushing Routine:

Remind parents of the important role oral health plays in overall health. Explain that by taking care of their own teeth, parents and caregivers are modeling behaviors that have a positive impact on the health of infants and children in the family as well.

Share the following recommendations with parents and caregivers to help them take the best care of their child's teeth.

Infants

Wipe baby's gums with a clean, soft cloth after each feeding. Start brushing with a soft bristle toothbrush after the first tooth comes in. Take baby for his first dental visit by his first birthday.

Young Children

Around age two, start brushing twice a day with a small amount (pea-sized) of fluoridated toothpaste. Brush once in the morning and once at night, right before bed. Be sure to have children spit out the toothpaste after brushing. Before the age of two, consult a dentist about toothpaste.

All Parents and Caregivers

Brush twice a day with a soft toothbrush and fluoridated toothpaste. Remember to implement good oral health practices with infants and help toddlers and preschoolers with their daily tooth brushing routine. Remind parents that they will need to supervise tooth brushing until children reach around seven years old.

Tips to Help Families Promote Good Oral Health in Their Home

Hold Infants During Feeding

Encourage parents and caregivers to hold their baby during feedings. When bottles are propped, the continuous drip can cause pooling in the mouth and bacterial growth. Propping a bottle with pillows, blankets or anything while feeding also poses a choking risk since the baby may not be able to control the flow of breast milk or formula into his mouth.

Keep Bottles and Cups Out of Bed

Do not allow infants or children to fall asleep with a bottle or cup that contains milk, formula, juice or any other sweetened liquid.

If children are accustomed to sleeping with a cup or bottle, share the following tips with parents and caregivers to help break the habit:

- Fill bottles or cups with water instead of milk, formula, juice or other sweetened liquids.
- Remove the bottle or cup once the child has fallen asleep.
- Offer an extra snuggle, stuffed animal or blanket instead of a cup or bottle for comfort around naps and bedtime.

Do Not Share Food or Utensils

Sharing food or utensils can transfer harmful bacteria from the caregiver's mouth to the child's.

Do not lick a pacifier to clean it.

Avoid Continuous Access to Bottles or Sippy Cups

Do not allow children or infants to carry bottles or sippy cups continuously throughout the day. Children should have access to a source of clean water for thirst and to stay hydrated.

