



news release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CARE FOR YOUR BABY'S FIRST TEETH EMPHASIZED DURING FEBRUARY'S NATIONAL CHILDREN'S DENTAL HEALTH MONTH

As anyone who has endured one knows, there are few things worse than a toothache. The pain of tooth decay can make eating, sleeping, and concentrating on daily activities extremely difficult. The misery of toothache can be especially troubling for children.

Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease among children. To combat this problem, the Westchester County Health Department is promoting early preventive dental care this month during National Children's Dental Health Month.

According to a survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly half of two-to-nine-year-olds in the United States suffer from untreated tooth decay. It is estimated that nearly 80 percent of children will have at least one cavity by the time they finish high school.

"Untreated dental disease can cause great suffering, contribute to lifelong health problems, and erode self-esteem," said Dr. Joshua Lipsman, Commissioner of Health for Westchester County. "Fortunately, dental disease is usually very preventable."

Serious tooth decay can often develop by a child's first birthday. Contrary to what many parents may think, caring for a child's primary teeth is as important as caring for his or her permanent teeth. As well as acting as natural space maintainers for the permanent teeth, healthy baby teeth are critical for proper chewing, speaking, and appearance.

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Early Childhood Caries is an infectious disease that causes cavities and can begin as soon as an infant's teeth appear. Decay-causing bacteria in saliva can be transferred from a parent or caregiver to a child on a shared spoon or on a bottle nipple that has been temperature tested by mouth. For this reason, it is important for the parent or caregiver to avoid sharing utensils with a child or orally testing the temperature of a bottle.

A major cause of tooth decay in young children is prolonged exposure of the teeth to milk, formula, fruit juice, or sweetened liquids. This occurs, for example, when a bottle is used as a pacifier at bedtime or during naps. These liquids are used by bacteria in the mouth to produce acid that attacks tooth enamel, causing decay.

“It is not only what children drink, but how often and for how long their teeth are exposed to decay-causing acids,” said Dr. Lipsman. “If a bottle containing a liquid other than water is used as a pacifier, the child's teeth have a greater chance of decaying.”

The Westchester County Health Department offers the following tips to help protect young children's teeth:

- Do not use a bottle as a pacifier or sleep aid unless it contains only water.
- Pacifiers should not be cleaned by mouth or dipped in sweet liquids.
- Children should be taught to drink from a cup as they approach their first birthday.
- Parents should wipe their baby's gums with a clean gauze pad after each feeding.
- Brush with plain water as soon as the baby's first tooth appears.
- An infant's first oral exam should occur within six months of the eruption of the first tooth and before he or she has a first birthday.
- As a child gets older, talk to a dentist about proper brushing with fluoridated toothpaste, flossing, healthy diet and snacks, sealant application, and protective mouth guards.

Parents who lack dental coverage for their children can get help from the Health Department to apply for State health insurance programs. Please call (914) 813-5601 for more information on the *Facilitated Enrollment Program*. In addition, dental services for children are available at the neighborhood health centers listed below, where fees are based on a sliding scale based on parents' income levels:

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Mt. Vernon Neighborhood Health Center
107 West 4th Street
Mt. Vernon, NY 10550
(914) 699-7200

Yonkers Community Health Center
30 South Broadway
Yonkers, NY 10701
(914) 968-4898

Greenburgh Neighborhood Health Center
330 Tarrytown Rd.
Greenburgh, NY 10607
(914) 989-7600

Open Door Family Medical Center
5 Grace Church St.
Port Chester, NY 10573
(914) 939-1175

Ossining Open Door
165 Main St.
Ossining, NY 10562
(914) 941-4412

Hudson River Community Health
1037 Main St.
Peekskill, NY 10566
(914) 739-8105

For more information, please call the Westchester County Health Department at (914) 813-5000 or visit the Health Department's website at www.westchestergov.com/health.