What is Dental Hygiene?

• “Dental hygiene” means the proper care of teeth.

Why Is Early Childhood Dental Hygiene Important?

• Cavities (also called dental caries) are a very common problem.

• More than 40% of children have cavities by the time they reach kindergarten.

What Are the Risk Factors for Cavities?

• Consuming sugary foods and drinks (juice and pop)

• Propping a bottle in a child’s mouth

• Going to bed with a bottle

• Not brushing teeth regularly and not going to the dentist regularly

• Some families are more at risk for cavities than others
Cavities in Baby Teeth: What Is the Big Deal?

• Even though baby teeth fall out, cavities in baby teeth are a big deal.

• Cavities in baby teeth can affect a child’s growth!
  • Cavities hurt. If a child’s teeth hurt, he or she won’t eat well.

• Cavities in baby teeth can cause problems in adult teeth.
  • Sometimes the adult teeth come in wrong and people have difficulty closing their mouths correctly.

• Cavities can cause serious infections.
  • Teeth are close to the sinuses and the brain. An untreated infection in a tooth can spread to the sinuses or brain.
  • These infections can become life-threatening.

• Cavities hurt a lot!
  • When children have tooth pain, they can’t concentrate well, and sometimes have to miss school

What Routine Dental Care Is Recommended for All Children to Prevent Cavities?

• Clean teeth from birth:
  • Caretakers should clean a baby’s gums
  • As soon as children get teeth, their caretaker should start cleaning them
  • It is ideal for a caretaker to brush the baby’s teeth off after every feeding. If that is not possible, teeth should be cleaned at least twice per day: morning and evening. Make this a daily routine so that children learn how important it is.

• Once teeth touch, a caretaker should floss in between the teeth once per day.

• Sugar should be a treat:
  • Kids should only drink one cup of juice per day.
  • No pop

• No bottles in bed!
  • Kids should not be put to bed with a bottle.
What Routine Dental Care Is Recommended for All Children to Prevent Cavities? (continued)

- If milk is in the bottle, the milk will sit in the child’s mouth and the sugar in it will cause cavities.
- So if a child insists on a bottle in bed, only give water.
- Don’t share drinks or forks or spoons with your child
  - This may sound funny, but an adult’s mouth has germs that can cause cavities in little kids
- Fluoride is great for teeth. It makes them stronger and helps to prevent cavities.
  - Caretakers should use fluoride toothpaste approved by the American Dental Association and rinse every night with an alcohol-free over-the-counter mouth rinse once the child is old enough to swish and spit.
  - Fluoride can be applied to the teeth in the dentist’s office, and sometimes in the pediatrician’s office.
  - Some public water has fluoride in it.
  - If your water does not have fluoride in it, ask your dentist or pediatrician about other ways to give your child fluoride.
- Take your child to the dentist at as young an age as possible. Some professionals recommend that a child go to the dentist as soon as he or she has teeth.
  - Early visits help the dentist find problems early.
  - Routine visits to the dentist help a child get used to the dentist. If a child only goes to the dentist when they have a toothache, the child might be scared of the dentist.