

# Keeping kids cavity free is everybody's business

Tooth decay is the most widespread chronic disease that affects children and the most common un-met health care need. Untreated oral disease can have a lasting impact on overall health, social and emotional development, and a young child's ability to succeed in school.

Whether you are a teacher, cook, bus driver, caregiver, health professional, or friend, there are things you can do to help children get or stay healthy.

**Here are some great ideas to get you started:**

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## **Encourage parents to help their children brush.**

Children do not have the necessary hand skills to brush well until they are 7 or 8 years old. Brushing twice a day (especially right before bed) with the right amount of fluoridated toothpaste can protect teeth from cavities.

**Be aware of changes.** If cavities are identified very early, they are easier to fix. Sometimes they can be reversed so a filling is not needed. Watch for changes in the child that can signal a problem in the mouth:

- Preference for softer foods
- Change in behavior- withdrawal, distraction, sadness or anger
- Facial swelling or fever



**Help child receive professional dental services.** There can be many challenges involved when trying to access dental services for young children:

- Limited Providers- Many state Medicaid programs are not well funded, making it difficult for dentists to be able to provide treatment. Even though a dental visit by age one is strongly recommended, some dentists have received little training and are uncomfortable accepting young children into their practice. We also have a mal-distribution of dentists across the nation, with many rural and frontier areas lacking adequate work force.
- Limited funding- In addition to low reimbursement rates for Medicaid, the high cost of dental services for the uninsured can put care out of reach.
- Limited knowledge about need- Many parents do not understand how important healthy baby teeth are to good overall health. Infection in the mouth can spread to other parts of the body. In addition, the greatest indicator for getting cavities in adult teeth is having cavities in baby teeth.



**Check with your local Head Start program, state Bureau of Oral Health, or your state's oral health coalition for information on where to access dental services.**

**Encourage healthy foods and eating habits.** Proteins like meat and cheese as well as fresh fruits and vegetables should be eaten as snacks. Limit sweet and processed foods and save them for mealtimes.



**Kansas Cavity Free Kids is committed to improving the oral health of pregnant women and young children through improved access to care, advocacy, and education for all.**