



Fact Sheet

Polish your pearly whites

Although a happy heart does not depend on healthy teeth, a smile will be brighter when a person has healthy teeth and gums. This is called oral health – health of the mouth – and oral health is important to overall health. Tooth decay is one of the most common health problems for children in America, leading to pain and infections that cause problems eating, speaking, playing and learning. But tooth decay is preventable. You can help your children take simple steps to protect their teeth and display a beautiful smile.

Begin brushing your infant’s gums with a washcloth or infant toothbrush even before her first baby teeth appear. Breastfeed your infant and put her to bed with a pacifier instead of a bottle.

From the time your child gets her first tooth until she is 3 years old, choose a soft-bristle toothbrush designed for an infant or child. Use a fluoride-free toothpaste, and put only as much as a grain of rice on the toothbrush. Taking care of a child’s baby teeth allows them to eat healthy foods like fruits and vegetables, and ensures their permanent teeth come in straight.

When your child is 3 – 6 years old he should use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste that contains fluoride. Choose toothpaste that says “ADA accepted,” which means it is approved by the American Dental Association. Teach your child not to swallow toothpaste, but to spit it out after brushing. Help young children brush their teeth so you can make sure they brush all the surfaces of each tooth. They should brush for at least two minutes, twice a day. Sing a song or use a timer to time them. They should also floss their teeth daily to remove food from between the teeth.

Your child should visit a dentist for her first check up before her first birthday, and twice a year for cleanings and a check-up each year after that. Your dentist may recommend you child get protective sealants at 6 and 12 years old to keep food out of the grooves on the back teeth.

Learn more by visiting www.phelpscountyhealth.com, or call (573) 458-6010.

The Phelps/Maries County Health Department – caring for your family, caring for our community, caring for YOU!



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