

# BRUSHING YOUR CHILD'S TEETH



**bright smiles**  
FROM BIRTH

*Proper teeth brushing can help protect your child from developing cavities and tooth decay.*

## **When should I start brushing my child's teeth?**

You can start brushing even before your baby even has teeth! Using a wet cloth, you should wipe the baby's gums after meals and before bed until the teeth come in (around 6 months old). Once your baby has teeth, switch to a small, soft toothbrush. Just like you, a child's teeth should be brushed at least twice a day and especially before bed.

## **What type of toothbrush should I use?**

Everyone should use a soft bristled toothbrush. Choose a size that is appropriate for your child. A smaller toothbrush is better than a larger, adult size toothbrush. You should never share toothbrushes and you should replace them every three months or when the bristles begin to spread out.

## **How do I brush my child's teeth?**

Using a small soft bristled toothbrush, place a small amount of toothpaste with fluoride on the brush. For children under two, use a very small smear of toothpaste no bigger than grain of rice. For children over two, you may use a pea size amount of toothpaste. Gently brush the teeth by using a circular, scrub brush motion. It is most important to brush the teeth near the gum line. This is where the germs that cause tooth decay are found. Start with the back teeth on the top and brush the outside surfaces all the way around to the other side and then do the same thing on with the bottom teeth. Don't forget to do the same thing for the inside (tongue side) of the teeth. Brush the chewing surfaces of the teeth last. Make sure to brush all sides of each tooth. It should take about two or three minutes to brush your child's teeth.

## **How much toothpaste should be used when brushing a child's teeth?**

Too much fluoride can stain your child's teeth so it is important that you do not use too much toothpaste. For children over two, a thin film of fluoride toothpaste about the size of pea should be used when brushing a child's teeth. Teach the child to spit out the toothpaste so that the child does not swallow it. For children less than 2 years of age, a very small smear of toothpaste the size of grain of rice should be used. Never let a child eat toothpaste and store toothpaste out of the reach of children.

## **How many times a day should a child's teeth be brushed?**

Make it a habit to brush the child's teeth at least twice a day, once before breakfast, and again before the child goes to sleep at night.

## **When can my child brush their own teeth?**

Remember, a child cannot brush their teeth on their own until around age 6 or when they can tie their own shoes. Make sure to teach them to brush their teeth by demonstrating how you brush

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™



Illinois Chapter