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about Sedgwick County Government

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Baby Bottle Tooth Decay

What is nursing/baby bottle tooth decay?

Baby bottle tooth decay is a dental condition that can destroy the teeth of an infant or a young child. The upper front teeth are the most susceptible to damage, but other teeth may also be affected.

Baby bottle tooth decay is a serious problem caused by putting your baby to bed with a bottle or letting the baby carry a bottle in his mouth during the day filled with formula, milk, juice or other sweetened beverages. Many times bottles are used as pacifiers to keep children quiet, but this is not healthy for the baby.

The sugar in milk, formula, juice or other common drinks for babies causes severe tooth decay (cavities). What matters is not just what children drink, but how often and for how long the teeth are exposed to decay-pronouncing acids.

How serious is baby bottle tooth decay?

Baby bottle tooth decay can cause painful toothaches that may make it hard to eat. Severely decayed teeth can become infected and may need to be extracted.

If your child's teeth are lost too early because of baby bottle tooth decay, your child may have some of these problems:

- Poor eating habits
- Speech problems
- Crooked teeth
- Damaged adult (permanent) teeth
- Yellow or brown teeth (baby or permanent)

How can I prevent nursing/baby bottle tooth decay?

Here are a few precautions parents can take to reduce nursing/baby bottle tooth decay:

- After each feeding wipe the child's teeth and gums with a damp washcloth or a small soft toothbrush to remove plaque.
- Begin brushing your child's teeth as soon as the first tooth erupts.
- Floss your child's teeth as soon as the teeth begin to touch.
- Start dental visits between 6 and 12 months

- Never allow your child to fall asleep with a bottle containing formula, milk, juice or a sweetened liquid. If your child refuses to fall asleep without a bottle, simply fill it with water and nothing else.

Tips for Parents to Remember

- Limit bottle feeding to mealtimes only.
- Clean your baby's mouth after feeding.
- Avoid feeding your baby sweets.
- Start using a cup when your baby sits up (5 to 7 months).
- By 12 months your child should be drinking from a cup (no bottles).
- Take your baby for a dental check by 12 months.
- Caregivers should also clean baby's mouth after infants nurse.
- Unrestricted at-will night time feedings after the first tooth comes in can lead to increased risk of tooth decay.

Instead of a Bottle

Instead of a bottle, there are many other ways to quiet and calm your baby:

- Hold or rock the baby.
- Give the baby a special blanket or stuffed toy.
- Use a pacifier.
- Rub the baby's back or head.
- Sing and talk to the baby.
- Play soft music or a windup toy near the baby's bed.

For More Information:

Contact the Sedgwick County Health Department by calling 316-660-7300 or visit the Sedgwick County website at www.sedgwickcounty.org.