

Head Start's Role in ECC Prevention & Early Intervention

Early Childhood Caries (ECC) is any tooth decay in a child under 6 years of age. While some children may only have one tooth that is decayed, and some may have multiple teeth that are decayed (as shown in the picture to the right) it is important to understand that **tooth decay in childhood is not normal and can be prevented.**



Early Childhood Caries is a devastating problem in young children. Not only can it cause pain and loss of teeth, but it also affects self esteem, speech development, nutrition, and school attendance. Preventing ECC is difficult because many things contribute to this disease process. There's where **you** can help by providing positive oral health messages to parents, applying fluoride varnish at Head Start, and referring children to the dentist.

The IHS has started a new initiative to draw attention to the problem of Early Childhood Caries, which afflicts more than half of Native American children. Below and on the back of this sheet is information on how you can help make a difference in our fight against ECC.



Best Practices for 0-5 year-olds

1. **Brushing twice daily** with fluoride toothpaste.
2. **Fluoride Varnish** applications 3-4 times a year.
3. **Offer healthy snacks** and avoid sweet drinks and foods.
4. **Early Access to Dental Care** may help keep children from having to be treated for severe decay in an operating room. Ask your dentist about caries stabilization.



Together, we can make a difference!

What can Head Start staff do to help?

1. Daily Brushing— Implement circle brushing in your classrooms to assure that all children receive supervised brushing daily with fluoride toothpaste.



2. Apply fluoride varnish— Head Start staff (directors, health coordinators, and teachers) can take the online course to be certified to apply fluoride varnish. Fluoride varnish should be applied 3-4 times each year.

3. Provide Positive Oral Health Messages—Take the time to talk to families about the following:

- ◆ Brush twice daily with fluoride toothpaste beginning when the first tooth erupts.
- ◆ Apply 3-4 fluoride varnish treatments a year.
- ◆ Limit the amount and frequency of sugary foods and drinks.



The **IHS Early Childhood Caries Initiative** is a collaborative project that includes dental staff, medical staff, Head Start, Community Health Representatives, WIC, and other key stakeholders in the oral health of children.

- ◆ To take the online course “How to Apply Fluoride Varnish,” go to <http://www.headstart.ihs.gov>.
- ◆ For more information about the ECC Initiative, go to: <http://www.doh.ihs.gov/ecc>.