

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. You can help by providing positive oral health messages to parents, applying fluoride varnish at Head Start, and referring children to the dentist.

The goal of the IHS ECC Collaborative is to draw attention to the problem and prevent Early Childhood Caries, which afflicts more than half of Native American children. Here's how you can help make a difference in our fight against ECC.



Best Practices to Prevent ECC

1. Pregnant women should visit the dentist, brush daily with fluoride toothpaste, and limit sweets and sodas.
2. Babies should visit the dentist as soon as the first tooth erupts.
3. Babies should be put to bed without a bottle and weaned from the bottle at 12 months of age.
4. Children should have their teeth brushed twice daily with fluoride toothpaste beginning when the first tooth erupts.
5. Limit sweets and sodas for babies and young children.
6. Children should receive 3-4 fluoride varnish treatments each year beginning soon after the first tooth erupts.
7. Parents should ask their dentist about Mighty Mouth sealants and fillings.

**Together, we CAN
make a difference!**

Go to <http://www.doh.ihs.gov/ecc>



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. Remind children to always brush their teeth before going to bed.



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. For more information about the ECC Collaborative, go to: <http://www.doh.ihs.gov/ecc>.



3. Provide Positive Oral Health Messages

Take the time to engage families in oral health:

- Show parents how to brush their young children's teeth and remind them to brush twice daily with fluoride toothpaste.
- Encourage families to limit sweets and sodas.
- Encourage families to follow-through with any needed dental treatment and to ask their dentists about Mighty Mouth sealants and fillings.

The IHS Early Childhood Caries Collaborative 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>.