

# Baby Bottle Tooth Decay

## What is baby bottle tooth decay?

When an infant or small child develops several cavities, usually on the top front teeth, it is called baby bottle tooth decay. These cavities may look like dark pits, holes or broken teeth and may cause toothaches and make it hard for the child to eat.

## What causes baby bottle tooth decay?

It happens when liquids that contain sugar are left in a baby's mouth for long or frequent periods of time. Even breast milk and formula contain sugar.

## How can you protect your child's teeth?

Your child **should not** —

- go to bed with a bottle filled with milk, formula, juice or sweetened drink
- sleep at night at the breast
- drink from a bottle throughout the day
- use a pacifier if it is dipped in honey, syrup or anything sweet, such as Jello™ water, soda pop, fruit juice, Kool-Aid™, sugar water, milk or formula

Your child **should** —

- start drinking from a cup at 6 months of age and be weaned from his or her bottle by 1 year of age
- go to bed without a bottle. If your child must have a bottle to sleep, fill it with plain water. You may need to mix the drink in the bottle with water, a little more water each night, until your child is drinking plain water.
- have his or her teeth cleaned after each feeding with a clean washcloth, gauze pad or a soft infant toothbrush. It is very important to clean your baby's teeth before bedtime!

## Are baby teeth important?

Baby teeth are important for chewing food and speaking properly. They also give your child a nice appearance and help to promote a good self image. If they are lost too early, the permanent teeth can come in crowded or out of line. Be sure your child visits a dentist before 2 years of age. These early efforts will be the key to your child's future dental health!

## For more information, contact

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NOTE: This fact sheet was derived from one previously published by the Arizona Department of Health Services.