



1. What is ECC?

Early Childhood Caries (ECC), also known as baby bottle tooth decay, is a common bacterial infection that can destroy teeth of infants and young children. It occurs most often in the upper front teeth, but other teeth may also be affected.

2. How do you get ECC?

ECC can occur when your child:

- Frequently drinks from a bottle filled with sugary liquids or milk.
- Receives a pacifier dipped in sugar, honey or a sweet liquid.
- Shares spoons, forks, or anything with someone else's saliva on it.

Children are not born with the bacteria that causes decay, but are infected with it, usually at an early age, from their caregiver – usually their mom.

3. How do you know if you have ECC?

The most common symptoms of ECC include:

- White spots on the surface of the upper front teeth
- White lines at the base of the teeth along the gum line
- Early development of cavities (brown areas on the tooth that lead to tooth destruction)

Lift your child's lip to look for early signs of decay. If you see white spots, especially on your child's front teeth, schedule an appointment with your dentist. All children should see a dentist within six months of the eruption of the first tooth, and no later than 12 months of age.

4. How is ECC treated?

A child with ECC needs to visit a dentist for treatment. The number of visits and type of treatment will depend on how bad the cavities are.

5. How can ECC be prevented?

- Inspect your child's teeth regularly.
- After each feeding, gently wipe your child's teeth and gums with a clean washcloth or gauze to remove plaque.
- Avoid saliva-sharing activities between adults and children (tasting baby food, sharing toys or pacifiers).
- Never give your child a pacifier dipped in anything sweet (honey, soda, sugar).
- Avoid filling your child's bottle with liquids such as sugar water and soft drinks.
- Start routine dental care at age 12 - 15 months.
- Around age two, start brushing with a small drop of fluoride toothpaste. Be sure the child does not swallow the toothpaste.
- Help children under eight years old brush their teeth. Use only a pea-sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste.
- Begin flossing children's teeth when all of the primary (baby) teeth have erupted (usually around age two and a half).
- Teach children over one year to drink from a cup instead of a bottle.

Sources

1. *Early Childhood Tooth Decay*. American Dental Association (ADA). <http://www.ada.org/public/topics/>
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) <http://www.cdc.gov/OralHealth/pdfs/BrushUpTips.pdf>
3. *Early Childhood Caries*. National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov>
4. *Early Childhood Caries*. The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. http://www.chop.edu/consumer/your_child/

For additional resources, please visit the L.A. County Department of Public Health website <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov>.