

Dental checks - 0 to 6 years

Children's teeth should be checked early. The Child Health Record recommends two checks before the age of three and a half years. This will help in early diagnosis and prevention of oral disease.

The checks may be done by a maternal and child health nurse, dentist, dental therapist or paediatrician. Information on dental care will be given to you at this time. The maternal and child health nurse may refer you to a dentist or other oral health professional.

Recommended mouth checks

Mouth checks with your maternal and child health nurse should occur at:

- 18 to 21 months
- Three to three and a half years.

Caring for your child's teeth

0 to 12 months

To help prevent oral health problems:

- Avoid adding sugar or honey to solid foods or dummies.
- Do not use lemon juice to relieve teething pain. The acid can damage erupting teeth.
- Avoid using a bottle or breast as a comforter – a baby should be removed from the breast or bottle when they have had enough.
- Provide children with a wide variety of nutritious foods such as finely mashed fruit and vegetables, legumes, natural yoghurt and meats.
- As soon as the first tooth appears (at approximately six–nine months) it should be cleaned twice a day. Use a damp piece of gauze or face washer, wrap it around a finger. Wipe each tooth front and back, continue this as each new tooth erupts.
- From 12 months clean your child's teeth with a small, soft toothbrush, simply wet the toothbrush with water.

12 to 18 months

To help prevent oral health problems:

- Try to wean your child from bottles and dummies from 12 months.
- Encourage water as the preferred drink when thirsty.
- It is best to limit sweet drinks including fruit juices, soft drinks, flavored water, cordials and sweet sticky foods including lollies especially between meals.
- Encourage healthy snacks such as fresh fruit pieces and natural yoghurt, cheeses and dry biscuits between meal times.
- If your water supply is not fluoridated, ask an oral health professional for advice on toothbrushing and fluoride.
- Continue to clean your child's teeth with a small, soft toothbrush and introduce a low fluoride toothpaste at 18 months. Smear a pea size amount across the toothbrush. Encourage children to spit out toothpaste and not swallow it.

18 months to 6 years

At this age:

- It is important that a child visits a dentist or other oral health professional regularly (as advised).

- Continue toothbrushing twice a day using a small, soft toothbrush with a pea size smear of low fluoride toothpaste. Children from about three years of age should be encouraged to do some of the toothbrushing themselves so that they develop toothbrushing skills. They still require an adult to assist them usually until they are 6–7 years old.
- Try to discourage any thumb or finger sucking habits especially when permanent teeth begin to erupt as this may cause teeth to grow out of line.

School age children

Ensure that your child:

- Visits a family dentist or other oral health professional regularly (as advised). During this time ask about fissure sealants.
- Brushes their teeth twice a day, after breakfast and before going to bed.
- Is encouraged to eat nutritious healthy snacks and limit sweet sugary foods especially between meals.
- Is encouraged to drink water and not sugary drinks when thirsty.

Daily flossing by an adult may reduce the possibility of tooth decay starting between the teeth. Flossing can begin as soon as two teeth are touching. Ask your dental or other oral health professional for advice.

Dental services available for children in Victoria

You can seek professional dental care for your child through:

- **Private dentists** – look in the yellow pages under ‘dentists’
- **Victoria’s public oral health services.**

All children who are 12 years and under are eligible for public oral health services. Children receive general oral health advice as well as dental check-ups and treatment. For more information and to find your closest public oral health service call 1300 360 054 or visit the Dental Health Services Victoria website.

Where to get help

- Your dentist or other oral health professional.
- Your doctor or general practitioner.
- Your public oral health service. To find your closest service Tel. 1300 360 054
- The Royal Dental Hospital of Melbourne clinic Tel. (03) 9341 1000 or 1800 833 039 (from rural Victoria) between 8.30am and 5.00pm Monday to Friday.
- For emergencies contact your public oral health service or The Royal Dental Hospital emergency service Tel. (03) 9341 1000 or 1800 833 039 (from rural Victoria) between 8.00am and 9.15pm Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 9.15pm on weekends and public holidays.
- Your maternal and child health nurse.

Things to remember

- Regular mouth checks with your maternal and child health nurse are recommended.
- The recommended ages for mouth checks are listed in your Child Health Record.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Dental Health Services Victoria

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