Dental caries, the most common chronic disease of childhood, can be prevented by providing early guidance to caregivers. Children need a dental home and first comprehensive oral/dental health exam by the age 1 year.

Early Childhood Caries (ECC) is an aggressive form of dental caries in children under age 6. Its most severe form is a rapidly progressing process that can have lifelong effects. Early lesions present as a white spot on a tooth surface. Untreated, it may progress to cavitation or involve the nerve, causing an abscess or facial cellulitis.

ASSESSMENT

MANAGEMENT/TREATMENT
After you determine the risk for caries, recommend:
• Brushing 2x/day with fluoride toothpaste, with help/supervision
  • Child age <3 years—use rice-sized amount of toothpaste
  • Child age 3+—use pea-sized amount of toothpaste
• Floss, once there are no spaces between teeth
• No milk or sugary beverages in bottle at bedtime
• Less than 4–6 ounces of juice per day at one meal, no juice between meals
  • If child is high risk, consider fluoride varnish
  • Consider antibiotics if abscess is present and is not visibly draining
  • Educate on how cavities form, importance of a dental home and dental care/treatment, and how to watch for signs of infection
  • Consider referral to Cincinnati Children’s ED if facial swelling/cellulitis present

If you would like additional copies of this tool, or would like more information, please contact the Physician Outreach and Engagement team at Cincinnati Children’s.
Dental Caries

**Patient Presents for visit with primary care provider/pediatrician**

**Complete clinical exam and caries risk assessment**

**Social/Biological Factors**
- Primary caregiver has dental caries
- Primary caregiver has a lifetime of poverty, low health literacy
- Child has >3 times per day exposures to between-meal sugar containing snacks or beverages
- Child uses a bottle or non-spill cup containing sugar-sweetened beverages between meals or at bedtime/night

**Clinical Factors**
- White spot lesions, cavitated lesions, or filled/or missing teeth

**Protective Factors**
- Use of a toothpaste with fluoride
- Exposure to optimal levels of fluoride
- Establishment of a dental home, and regular dental care

**High Risk**

**Active Infection/Caries**

**Dental Home?**
- No
  - Refer to pediatric dentist
  - Apply fluoride varnish
  - Reinforce oral hygiene instructions
  - Review healthy diet

**Extra-Oral Swelling?**
- Yes
  - Apply fluoride varnish
  - Reinforce oral hygiene instructions
  - Review healthy diet

**No**
- Yes
  - EMERGENCY: Consult dentist immediately
  - Consider antibiotics
  - If systemic signs (i.e. fever, malaise, trismus, not eating) or approaching eye or concern for airway, refer to ED for immediate medical management and consider antibiotics

**Intra-Oral Swelling/Abscess?**
- Yes
  - Refer to dentist ASAP
  - Consider antibiotics
  - If extra-oral swelling develops refer to ED

**Low Risk**

- Yes
  - Reinforce good oral hygiene
  - Regular dental visits
  - Review healthy diet

For urgent issues, or to speak with the specialist on call 24/7, call the Physician Priority Link® at 1-888-987-7997.