



CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

7 NORTH ERIE STREET, MAYVILLE, NEW YORK 14757-1027
PHONE (716) 753-4314 FAX (716) 753-4794

GREGORY J. EDWARDS
County Executive

CHRISTINE SCHUYLER, BSN, MHA
Public Health Director

ANGELA SWARTZMAN, BS, MHA
Director of Administrative Services

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Contact: Christine Schuyler (753-4314)
Commissioner of Human Services

FEBRUARY IS CHILDREN'S DENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

Parents know that a healthy smile is one sign of a healthy child. Oral health experts agree that the health of your baby's teeth begins during pregnancy. Good nutrition and regular care of teeth and gums and dental checkups should be routine for women of child bearing age.

"February is Children's Dental Health month, a time to learn about dental care and good dental health for your child," said Christine Schuyler, Commissioner of Human Services for Chautauqua County. "Wiping your newborn baby's gums after feeding will prevent bacteria from growing. Cleaning your baby's new teeth with a soft toothbrush will prevent bacteria from growing and will remove milk from the gums and tooth surfaces."

As your baby becomes a toddler, he/she should eat a variety of foods from the five major food groups: vegetables; fruits; breads, grains and cereals; dairy products; and meats. Avoid sugary foods that stick to teeth to form plaque, such as sugary cereals and sweet drinks. Offer nutritious snacks such as fruit, vegetables or dairy products.

Babies or toddlers who are allowed a bottle of milk, formula or juice during naps or bedtime can develop "baby bottle tooth decay." This occurs when the sugar in the liquid rests on the gums and new teeth and causes decay. "If your baby must sleep with a bottle, be sure it contains only water. Community water fluoridation reduces the risk of tooth decay," Schuyler said. Municipalities in Chautauqua County that provide fluoride to residents through the water supply include Jamestown, Lakewood, Celoron, Falconer, Westfield (Village), and Silver Creek. Portions of Busti, Ellicott, Kiantone, and Hanover are also served by fluoridated water.

The following will also keep your child's teeth healthy:

- Start cleaning your baby's mouth at birth. Begin by wiping top and bottom gums with a clean damp cloth every day to remove bacteria and milk from your baby's gums and new teeth.
- As the first tooth appears, begin using a soft dry baby toothbrush. Cradle your baby's head in your arm and gently brush their teeth and gums.
- Under age two, non-fluoridated toothpaste is optional. Check with your dentist or physician to see if fluoridated toothpaste is recommended for your child.
- Parents should ask if their water is fluoridated. If your drinking water is not fluoridated, talk to your physician or dentist about fluoride tablets or varnish.
- Brushing with fluoridated toothpaste can begin when your child is two years old. (Use a small smear of toothpaste on a toothbrush).

- Parents should brush their children's teeth twice a day, especially before bedtime. Even children who appear to have good dexterity should allow parents to brush their teeth until they are age six or seven.
- When your child is six, teach your child to use a small pea-sized amount of toothpaste and a timer so they brush for two minutes. When brushing is done, spit out the toothpaste, rinse the toothbrush and allow it to dry. Fluoridated toothpaste should be the last thing to touch your child's teeth before bed, and toothbrushes are not to be shared.

The American Academy of Pediatrics says that tooth decay is the most common chronic children's disease in the country. So it's important that parents work with their pediatrician to establish good oral health care from the first weeks of their baby's life.

The American Dental Association (ADA) recommends that a child be seen by a dentist as soon as his/her first tooth erupts, but at least before the first birthday. A dentist visit at an early age is a "well baby checkup" for the teeth. Besides checking for tooth decay and other problems, the dentist can show how to clean the child's teeth properly and can evaluate any potential oral health problems.

It can often be difficult to find a dentist who accepts Medicaid. In Chautauqua County, The Resource Center, with clinics in Jamestown and Dunkirk, and the University at Buffalo's Mobile Dental Van (also known as "The Tooth Trolley") provide dental health services for children with Medicaid and Child Health Plus. Parents can contact The Resource Center Dental Clinics by calling 716-661-1431 (Jamestown) or 716-366-1661 (Dunkirk). The Tooth Trolley travels around the County providing services in various locations. To find out about their schedule and location, parents can call 1-866-254-0052.

Children should wear a mouth guard when playing sports.

Children with healthy teeth find it easier to chew food properly, learn to speak clearly, and smile with confidence. Help your children maintain a lifelong healthy smile by providing them with well-balanced meals, nutritious snacks, an opportunity to brush twice a day and floss once a day, and provide regular dental check-ups.

Families and individuals without dental insurance can save money on dental procedures by joining the Dental Network Card Program. With a membership fee of \$36.50 per year for individuals or \$52 per year for families, users have access to discounted rates at participating dental offices. To find out more information about the Dental Network Card visit the Health Department's website:

www.myhealthycounty.com.

For more information on children's dental health, visit the New York State Department of Health website: http://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/dental/infant_oral_health.htm.

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