



Your Child's First Dental Visit

New parents often ask us, "When should my child first see a dentist?"

The short answer is: "First visit by first birthday."

That's the view of the [American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry](#) and the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#). The idea of such early dental visits is still surprising to many new parents, however, national studies have shown that preschool-aged children are getting more cavities than ever before. More than 1-in-4 children in the United States has had at least one cavity by the age of 4.ⁱ With many kids getting cavities as early as age 2.ⁱⁱ However, many dental problems can be prevented or more easily treated in the early stages, so it is extremely important to visit a trained Pediatric Dental Specialist (Just as you would bring your child to a pediatrician for their healthcare needs, a Pediatric Dentist is the "Pediatrician of Teeth"). Since pediatric dentists spend several years after dental school in specialty programs further educating and training themselves on how to work with children, you should look for an office that you trust (has a great reputation) and has a dentist that makes you and your child feel comfortable. Dentists and pediatricians call these types of offices "A Child's Dental Home."ⁱⁱⁱ

At your Dental Home, your child's first appointment (and each subsequent appointment) will consist of:

- A Thorough Dental Exam: where the dentist will evaluate your child's current dental status, look for any cavities, assess growth and development of the jaw, and examine the soft tissues and gums.^{iv}
- A Complete Cleaning: Even a one year old child can have staining and build-up on their teeth. A Pediatric Dentist is trained in proper cleaning and brushing techniques to remove these stains and clean the mouth.
- A Fluoride Treatment: Depending on your child's Caries-risk Assessment,^v the dentist may recommend the use of a topical fluoride paste to be administered in office and/or the use of fluoride drops or tablets at home.

Along with making sure your child's mouth is healthy and developing correctly, the Pediatric Dentist will also educate the parent about their child's current oral health status,

discuss any risk of developing cavities, teach you how to manage diet and hygiene, and whether an at-home supplemental fluoride is recommended. At the Age 1 Dental Visit, parents will also learn about:

- How to care for an infant's or toddler's mouth
- Proper use of fluoride
- Oral habits: including finger and thumb sucking
- Preparation and Education of common dental traumas
- Teething and milestones of development
- The link between diet and oral health

After this first visit, the dentist will suggest a schedule of follow-up visits. In the past, dentists typically called for visits every six months. Now, the schedule may vary according to each child's needs and risks. As your child grows, the dental team can help you learn how to prevent common oral problems.

At the first visit, you will get your questions answered and start to build a relationship with the dentist and dental office. The best way to prepare for this visit is to familiarize yourself with what you should expect and prepare any questions you may have.

Examples of what to learn at your appointment are:

- How to reach the office in case of an accident or dental emergency
- Specific advice about regular follow-up care
- Learn what will happen next in your child's oral development
- How to help guard and promote your child's oral health

Preparing for the Age 1 Dental Visit

The purpose of the “Age 1 Dental Visit” is to make sure that your child's teeth look healthy, that growth and development are progressing appropriately and it's an opportunity for parents to learn about their child's oral health and how to best care for your child's unique needs before any problems occur. Many dental problems can be prevented or more easily treated in the early stages, so it is very important to visit a trained pediatric dental specialist.

At the appointment, your child may fuss during parts or all of the dental visit – please remember though, this is behavior that the Pediatric Dentist and her entire staff are fully trained for and prepared to handle. However, parents are often surprised at how accepting infants can be when the dentist examines them. They may enjoy the attention and novelty of

the visit. Studies have shown that the earlier a child establishes a dental home, the better their behavior is during the formidable years of 2-5, as well as creating a life-long comfort at the dentist.^{vi}

What To Expect at the Office

The Age 1 Dental Visit is similar to a well-baby check at the physician's office. At this visit, you should expect the dentist or hygienist to:

- Review your child's history
- Respond to your questions and concerns
- Talk with you about your child's overall oral health, including:
 - Development
 - Teething
 - Bite (how your child's teeth will come together)
 - Soft tissues such as gums and cheeks
 - Oral habits such as sucking
 - Factors that affect the risk of cavities, such as diet, hygiene practices, fluoride use and whether others in the family have had cavities
 - How to prevent trauma to your child's mouth

It is very likely in these early exams, especially if your child is less than 3 years old, that it will be a "lap exam."^{vii} During a lap exam, you and the dentist sit on chairs facing each other. Your child sits on your lap, facing you. You then lay your child back with his or her head in the dentist's lap. In this position, both you and your dentist can see clearly into your child's mouth and your child can look up at you. This position allows the dentist to thoroughly examine your child's mouth while allowing you to be in constant contact with your child.

During this time, the dentist will show you:

- How to clean your child's teeth and give you a chance to practice
- Give specific advice about home care, including hygiene, diet and use of toothpaste and fluorides/supplements
- Tell you what to expect as your child grows and develops in the coming months
- Suggest a schedule for follow-up care

The dentist will also clean your child's teeth and remove any stains that commonly appear on infant teeth. The dentist may apply fluoride, particularly if your child has a higher than average risk of developing cavities.

Final Thoughts

Your child's health and well-being is of the utmost importance to you. For all of us at Novato Pediatric Dentistry, it is of the utmost importance to us as well. We take such great pride in creating an environment where kids are comfortable, educated, cared for, and respected. Our goal is to educate every parent about the importance of “Baby Teeth” and proper oral healthcare. Before you leave our office, you should have a clear understanding about:

- Your child's development
- Your responsibilities
- Follow-up care by the dentist
- Your child's likelihood of having problems with cavities or bite in the future
- You should have all your questions answered.

But most importantly, you also should know what you and the dentist can do together to make sure your child has a lifetime of excellent oral health. Dr. Banakus, Dr. Beed, and the entire staff at Novato Pediatric Dentistry are committed to achieving that goal.

- i <http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/aag/doh.htm>
- ii <http://www.mychildrensteeth.org/assets/2/7/ECCstats.pdf>
- iii <http://www.mychildrensteeth.org/assets/2/7/dentalhome.pdf>
- iv http://www.aapd.org/media/Policies_Guidelines/E_PeriodontalDisease.pdf
- v http://www.aapd.org/media/Policies_Guidelines/G_CariesRiskAssessment.pdf
- vi <http://www.mychildrensteeth.org/assets/2/7/PDVRRelease.pdf>
- vii <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/ofhs/childandfamily/dental/lapexam>