

Seven things you may not know about kids' teeth

By KIM GLOVER, R.D.H.

1. It is important to clean a baby's mouth, whether she has teeth or not. Start by swabbing her mouth with a thin washcloth once or twice a day. When her teeth come in, you may still use the washcloth, as a toothbrush may be too awkward to use in a tiny mouth. You can even put a little good-tasting brushing gel on the washcloth, which baby will enjoy the taste of. More information on toothpaste amounts is provided in the fluoride section below.

2. An estimated 1 in 2,000 babies are born with teeth. These are called "natal teeth" and usually are where the primary (baby) lower central incisors will come in later. Natal teeth often have very short roots, so they are usually wiggly.

If your child has these teeth, your pediatrician will advise you of the proper treatment. Sometimes these short-rooted teeth will be easily wiggled out by the doctor. It has been reported that Ivan the Terrible, King Richard III of England, and Napoleon Bonaparte all had natal teeth.

3. The human mouth can have 700 different types of bacteria. Some are good, some are bad. It is important for you to take good care of your mouth so you aren't sharing gum disease or cavity-causing bacteria with your kids – this happens when we share utensils and water bottles.

4. Dried fruits can be bad for teeth because of the natural sugar, the acidity and the stickiness. When sticky, acidic things adhere

to teeth, they are softening and weakening the enamel. This is true for gummy fruit, candies, and vitamins as well.

5. Children can get too much fluoride. If kids swallow too much fluoride during the years their permanent teeth are developing under the gums (roughly ages 1-16), the permanent teeth may develop with fluorosis, which means the permanent teeth may have white, yellow, or brown spots. Make sure kids three years and under use just a smear of fluoride toothpaste on the toothbrush bristles. This should be about the same size as a grain of rice. Children four and older should use a pea-sized amount of paste.

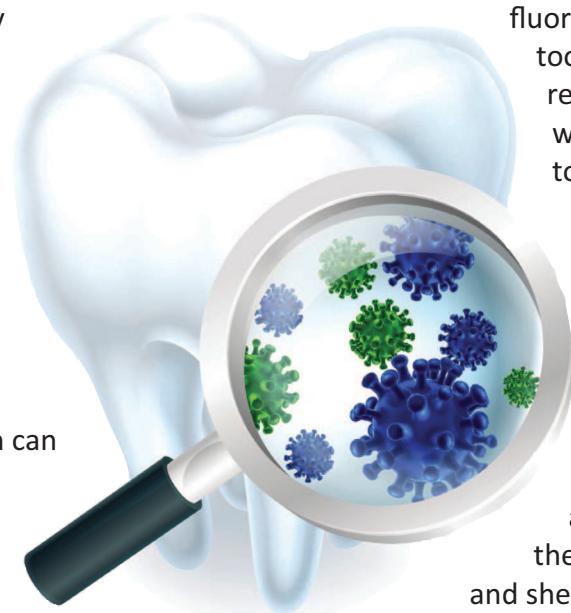
If you are using non-fluoride toothpaste, use a similar amount. However the amount is not as critical when the paste does not have

fluoride. Keep all toothpaste out of reach of small kids who may decide to eat it!

6. Don't have your child brush her teeth after vomiting. Her teeth will be very soft for 20 minutes after exposure to the stomach acid, and she will be brushing away enamel. Just have your child swish with water or use a fluoride mouthrinse to get rid of the bad taste.

7. Baby teeth usually fall out in the same order as they came in. Most kids get their two lower incisors first, then the upper incisors. Next will be the lower lateral incisors, then the uppers. The canines and molars will follow. You'll notice permanent teeth usually erupt in the same order.

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