

# Preventing Early Childhood Tooth Decay

Early Childhood Tooth Decay (ECTD) is a dental condition that can severely damage the developing teeth of children between the ages of six months and four years old. ECTD can be very painful for children, and difficult and expensive to fix if left untreated.

## What causes Early Childhood Tooth Decay?

ECTD occurs when children frequently drink from bottles or sippy cups that contain juice, soda or other sugary liquids, or often snack on sugary foods. If the liquid stays in the mouth for a long period of time, the teeth get cavities that sometimes can't be fixed. The sugar in the liquid combines with bacteria on the teeth to produce acids that attack the child's teeth, which causes them to decay. It's important to know that almost all liquids, including milk, formula, juices and other sweet drinks, have sugar in them.

## How can I protect my child's teeth?

The following tips will help you protect your child's teeth:

- Don't fill up your child's bottle or sippy cup with juice, soda or other sugary drinks.
- Don't put your child to bed with a bottle. If your baby needs to be comforted, use either a bottle filled with plain water only or a clean pacifier.
- Teach your child to drink from a cup by 12 months of age.
- Clean your child's teeth and gums with a clean washcloth or a soft toothbrush at least once a day, preferably before bedtime.

For more information on ECTD, talk with your dentist or physician.

