

When should I begin fluoride for my child?

Studies show fluoride can reduce the chance of decay by as much as 60%. Fluoride protects teeth in two ways. When it is ingested (swallowed) it is taken up by the body and incorporated in the teeth that are growing. At about 6 months of age, your baby will have 20 baby teeth, and up to 28 permanent tooth buds growing in his or her jaw. Fluoride that is ingested either from a fluoridated water system, or in the form of a prescription in non fluoridated areas like Lafayette can help protect the teeth. Most Pediatricians are aware of this and provide vitamin prescriptions with fluoride starting around 6 months of age.

The second way fluoride helps protect teeth is by the topical effect (fluoride coming in contact with the tooth enamel surface). The fluoride is absorbed by the enamel and this makes it stronger and less susceptible to decay. This type of fluoride is not meant to be swallowed and is applied to the teeth in several ways. The most common is toothpaste. Fluoridated toothpaste should be applied to infants and young children's teeth, but in very small amounts, and only by the parents until the child is able to brush, spit and not swallow the toothpaste. Your dentist can advise you how to properly apply fluoride toothpaste on the teeth of infants and young children.

Fluoride can also be topically applied to teeth by rinsing with a fluoride rinse. This is recommended for children 6 years and older who can rinse and spit without swallowing. Dentist recommend that fluoride be applied to children's teeth professionally, 2 or 3 times a year by using a special gel or foam in the dental office. This has been shown to be very effective and least expensive measures to prevent decay. Early and regular checkups at your Pediatric Dentist will assure you are providing the most protection fluoride can offer in the safest manner possible.

William A. Keaty, DDS is a board certified practicing Pediatric Dentist in Lafayette, LA. Questions can be submitted by email at drkeaty@nocavitykids.com, by mail @ 350 Doucet Rd. Ste. 101, Lafayette, LA 70503. Answers will be addressed in this column as time and space permit.