



# Brush Up on Oral Health

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## Oral Health and School Readiness

School readiness begins with health because a child must be healthy to be ready to learn. School readiness depends on positive physical, social and emotional, learning, language, and cognitive development. Oral health impacts each of these areas and plays an important role in a child's school readiness.

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* describes the impact of oral health on a child's ability to learn. It includes strategies and resources Head Start staff can use to promote oral health among parents and in the classroom. A recipe for a healthy snack that can be made in the Head Start classroom or at home is also included.

### Did You Know?

- Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease of childhood. It affects more than one in four children ages 2 to 5.
- Tooth decay is 100 percent preventable.



## The Impact of Oral Health on School Readiness

The health of a child's mouth can affect all aspects of a child's life. Children with poor oral health may:

- Have a hard time concentrating and learning because they are in pain
- Miss more school days
- Develop other serious health conditions, such as infections
- Stop smiling, cover their mouth with their hands when they speak, or withdraw from family, friends, and teachers if others comment on the appearance of their teeth

The good news is that tooth decay can be prevented. Ingredients of good oral health include brushing with fluoride toothpaste twice a day and visiting the dental office regularly. Eating healthy meals and snacks and drinking water containing fluoride are also important for good oral health.

# Healthy Habits for Happy Smiles

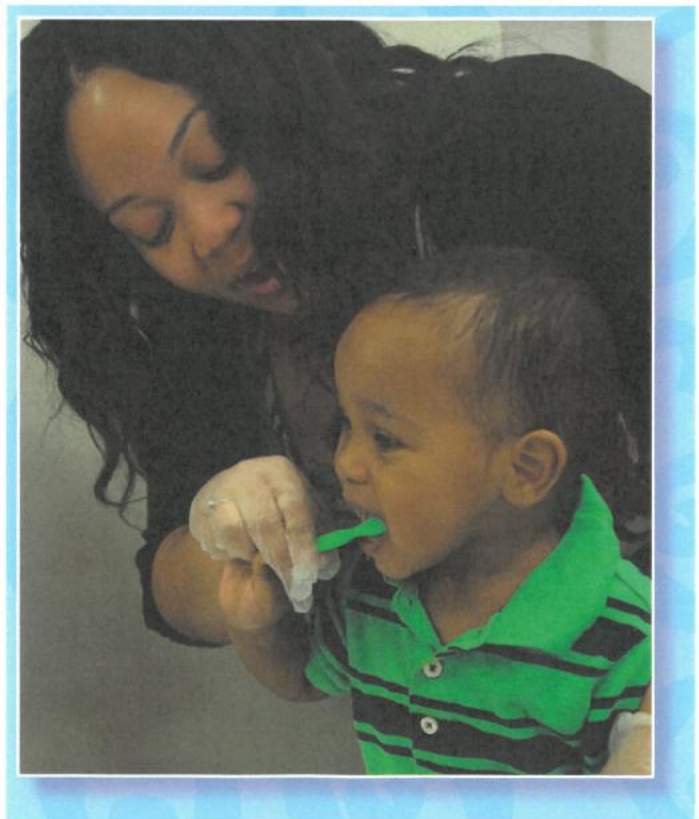


## Brushing Your Child's Teeth

**B**rushing is one of the main ways you can keep your child's teeth healthy. You should brush your child's teeth with fluoride toothpaste twice each day to help prevent tooth decay (cavities). Begin brushing as soon as your child's first tooth begins to show.



*School readiness begins with health!*



## Tips for brushing your child's teeth:

- Brush your child's teeth after breakfast and before bed.
- Use a child-sized toothbrush with soft bristles and fluoride toothpaste.
  - For children under age 3, use a small smear of fluoride toothpaste.
  - For children ages 3 to 6, use fluoride toothpaste the size of a pea.
- Young children like to do things by themselves. It's good to let children brush their teeth while an adult watches. But children under age 7 or 8 cannot brush their teeth well yet. An adult needs to brush the child's teeth too.
- Find a position where your child is comfortable and you can see your child's

teeth while you brush. For example, sit on the floor with your baby's or young child's head in your lap. Or stand behind your child in front of the mirror.

- Gently brush your child's teeth using small circles. Brush all surfaces of the teeth, including the insides and outsides.
- After brushing, have your child spit out the remaining toothpaste but not rinse. The small amount of toothpaste that stays in your child's mouth is good for the teeth.
- If you are having trouble brushing your child's teeth, use a timer, a counting game, or a song while brushing. You can also ask the staff at your child's dental clinic for help.



*Use a smear for children under age 3.*



*Use a pea-size amount for children ages 3 to 6.*

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Photo requiring credit: <http://www.wikihow.com/Clean-Toddler's-Teeth> (front page, top)



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