

The Public Health Nurse's Role in ECC Prevention & Early Intervention

Early Childhood Caries (ECC, also known as early childhood tooth decay) is any tooth decay in a child under 6 years of age. While some children may only have one tooth that is decayed and some may have multiple teeth that are decayed, such as the picture to the right, it is important to understand that **tooth decay is not or should not be a normal part of childhood and can be prevented**. ECC is a devastating problem in young children. Not only can it cause pain and loss of teeth, but it also affects self esteem, speech development, nutrition, and school attendance.



The IHS has started a new initiative to draw attention to the problem of ECC, which afflicts more than half of Native American children. Below and on the back of this sheet is information on how you as a public health/community health nurse can help make a difference in our fight against ECC.

Time Period (Age)	Why you may see the child	What you can do to help prevent ECC
6 months	Immunizations: <i>Hep B, DTAP, RV, Hib, PCV, IPV, Influenza,</i>	Screen for cavities Apply fluoride varnish Educate parents about ECC
12 months	Immunizations: <i>Hep B, DTAP, Hib, PCV, IPV, Influenza, MMR, Varicella, Hep A</i>	Screen for cavities Apply fluoride varnish Educate parents about ECC
15 months	Immunizations: <i>Hep B, DTAP, Hib, PCV, IPV, Influenza, MMR, Varicella, Hep A</i>	Screen for cavities Apply fluoride varnish Educate parents about ECC
18 months	Immunizations: <i>Hep B, DTAP, IPV, Influenza, Hep A</i>	Screen for cavities Apply fluoride varnish Educate parents about ECC
19-23 months	Immunizations: <i>Influenza, Hep A</i>	Screen for cavities Apply fluoride varnish Educate parents about ECC
2-3 years	Immunizations: <i>PPV, Influenza, Hep A, MCV4</i> Early Head Start vision and hearing screenings	Screen for cavities Apply fluoride varnish Educate parents about ECC
4-6 years	Immunizations: <i>DTAP, PPV, IPV, MMR, Varicella, Hep A Series, MCV4</i> Head Start vision, hearing, and weight screenings	Screen for cavities Apply fluoride varnish Educate parents about ECC



Together, we can make a difference!

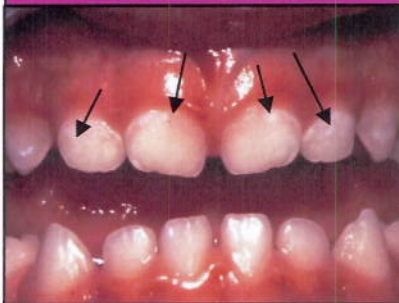
What can PHNs do to help?

1. Oral Health Assessment—

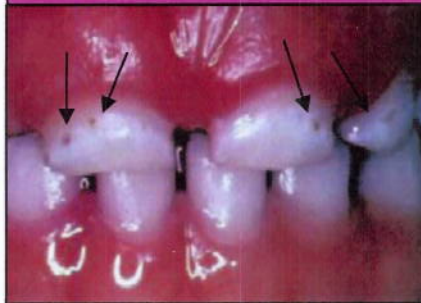
Nurses can do oral health assessments on young children to look for chalky spots, black spots in grooves, and cavities (holes in teeth). When doing a screening, wipe teeth with gauze and position the child as shown in this picture (called “knee to knee”). Below are some pictures that can help you. If you see any obvious cavities, refer the child to the dental clinic.



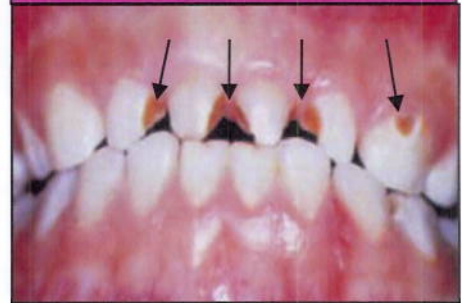
White spot lesions—
APPLY FLUORIDE VARNISH



Early cavities (brown spots)—
APPLY FLUORIDE VARNISH
REFER TO DENTAL CLINIC



Severe decay (holes in teeth)—
APPLY FLUORIDE VARNISH
REFER TO DENTAL CLINIC



2. Apply fluoride varnish—

Start by getting fluoride varnish, gauze, and gloves. Wipe all teeth dry with gauze and wipe varnish over all of the teeth, inside and out. Don't worry about getting it on the gums. It should only take a minute or less to apply varnish. Fluoride varnish should be applied 3-4 times each year to help prevent tooth decay and to stop existing decay from getting worse. Use RPMS code V07.31 for applying fluoride varnish.



3. Provide Positive Oral Health Messages—

Take the time to talk to parents about the following:

- ◆ Brush twice daily with fluoride toothpaste beginning when the first tooth erupts.
- ◆ Apply 3-4 fluoride varnish treatments a year.
- ◆ Never put baby in bed with a bottle.
- ◆ Limit the amount and frequency of sugary foods and drinks.

The **IHS Early Childhood Caries Initiative** is a collaborative project that includes dental staff, medical staff, Community Health Representatives, Head Start, WIC, and other key stakeholders in the oral health of children.

- ◆ To take the online course “How to Apply Fluoride Varnish,” and for more information about the ECC Initiative, go to: <http://www.doh.ihs.gov/ecc>.