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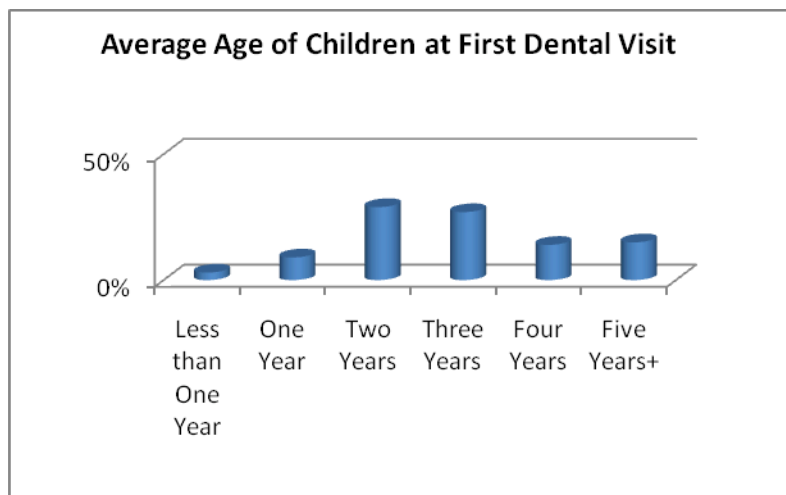
American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry Encourages Parents to “Get it Done in Year One” for a Lifetime of Healthy Smiles

Survey finds that 97 percent of parents aren't providing proper oral care for their infants

CHICAGO (May 6, 2010) – Parents will do anything to make their children smile, yet many are missing the preventive measures and specialized care needed to keep smiles healthy. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) recently sponsored a survey to see what moms knew about proper oral health care for their children. The survey results found that a staggering number of moms are misinformed about the importance of infant dental visits and proper at-home care.

“Oral health is absolutely critical for overall health,” said AAPD President Dr. William C. Berlocher. “Parents know the value of early visits to the pediatrician, but it’s alarming to learn how few parents understand that infants need to see the pediatric dentist before their first birthday, even before baby teeth appear.”

Among the survey results, an overwhelming 97 percent of respondents didn’t know their children needed to visit a pediatric dentist in the first year of life, leaving a large number of infants potentially vulnerable to tooth decay and disease. Tooth decay can begin as early as the teeth begin to emerge, typically at six months, and often progresses rapidly. Left untreated, it can destroy tiny teeth and lead to needless pain and suffering, infection, loss of function, increased health care costs and lifelong health consequences.



“We were astounded that only one-third (33 percent) of moms considered oral health a concern for their infants,” said Dr. Berlocher. “Parents will be surprised to know that taking children to visit a pediatric dentist by their first birthday actually **saves** money. Studies show that dental costs for children who have their first dental visit before age one are 40 percent lower in the first five years than for those who do not see a dentist prior to their first birthday.”

Only specialists in pediatric dentistry have the unique education and training required to care for children’s developmental needs. Following dental school, pediatric dentists have two-to-three years of specialty training, with an emphasis on child psychology, growth and development. Pediatric dentists’ education also focuses on care for at-risk and special needs children. The survey found that while approximately 75 percent of moms were aware of the specialty of pediatric dentistry, more than half had never taken their children to visit primary care pediatric dentists.

A total of 78 percent of survey respondents agreed they would take their children to visit a pediatric dentist before their first birthday if they knew that the visit would result in better oral hygiene as they developed. Preventive care, particularly pediatric dental care, is essential for giving children the proper foundation for a healthy life, from childhood through adolescence and beyond. During a year one dental visit, pediatric dentists examine children to detect early tooth decay, determine fluoride needs and monitor proper oral and facial development.

“A recent study in the journal *Pediatric Dentistry* revealed that children who wait to have their first visit until age two or three are more likely to require restorative and emergency visits, a scary thing for parents of young children,” said Dr. Berlocher. “Tiny mouths need to be properly cared for, both in the dentist’s chair and at home, or the results can be devastating.”

While 88 percent of moms surveyed claimed that they were concerned about cavities in baby teeth, many moms are unsure of how to keep small smiles healthy at home. Nearly half (45 percent) of moms surveyed did not regularly clean their babies’ mouths, and less than one-third began brushing their children’s teeth before the age of one. Even before baby teeth grow in, infant mouths need proper dental care for teeth to grow strong.

The AAPD recommends the following **“Get it Done in Year One” Checklist** to keep infant mouths healthy and prevent infection:

- Clean infants’ mouths and gums regularly with a soft infant toothbrush or cloth and water. Once baby teeth appear, brush them at least twice daily with an age-appropriate sized toothbrush and a “smear” of fluoridated toothpaste.
- Give children older than six months fluoride supplements if their drinking water does not contain enough fluoride. (Fluoride supplementation in infants has been shown to reduce tooth decay by as much as 50 percent.)
- Wean infants from the bottle by 12-14 months of age. Have infants drink from a cup as they approach their first birthday.
- Visit the pediatric dentist before children’s first birthday and twice annually following the first appointment.
- Avoid at-will breast feeding after the first baby tooth appears and other foods are introduced.

Additional survey findings included 26 percent of parents who felt that children only need to see a dentist in the case of a serious health problem, along with just 14 percent of parents who realized that tooth decay in children can ultimately lead to the need for a root canal – even in infants.

“We hope that these survey results serve as a wake-up call for parents,” said Dr. Berlocher. “Helping children grow into strong, healthy adults begins in the first year of life and the pediatric dentist is crucial to the team of physicians necessary for that growth.”

Visit www.aapd.org for more information or to locate a pediatric dentist.

About AAPD

Founded in 1947, the AAPD is a not-for-profit membership organization representing the specialty of pediatric dentistry. AAPD’s 7,700 members are predominately pediatric dentists and primary care providers who deliver comprehensive specialty treatments for infants, children, adolescents and individuals with special health care needs. As advocates for children’s oral health, the AAPD aims to promote the use of evidence-based policies and guidelines, foster research concerning pediatric oral health, and educate health care providers and the public to improve children’s oral health. For further information, please visit the AAPD Web site at www.aapd.org.