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ORAL HEALTH IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF TOTAL HEALTH

A healthy, pain free mouth is something to which every child is entitled. A healthy mouth and healthy teeth assist a child to develop proper eating and speaking patterns and contribute to a child's psychological well being. Problems with teeth can impact a child's ability to eat a variety of healthy foods. Poor sleep patterns and behavioural problems can occur due to pain. Early childhood caregivers are in the important position of being able to provide guidance to children and parents to establish good dental health habits for life.

DENTAL DECAY

Dental decay is an identified problem in both Simcoe County and the District of Muskoka. Statistics gathered by the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit reveal that 12 per cent of 5 year olds showed evidence of ECTD (Early Childhood Tooth Decay). These problems started at an early age. Tooth decay is preventable and untreated cavities require treatment.

PRIMARY TEETH (BABY TEETH, DECIDUOUS TEETH)

The primary teeth begin to erupt at about 6 months of age and all 20 of these teeth are usually present by age 3. Some of these teeth (molars) stay in place until the child is 12 years of age. Primary teeth at the front of the mouth are the first to be lost and this usually starts around the age of 6 years. At the same time, the first permanent molar will appear behind the primary molars. Permanent teeth are meant to last a lifetime.

EARLY CHILDHOOD TOOTH DECAY

This is a severe form of dental disease occurring prior to age 5 years. Rapid decay of primary teeth occurs due to repeated exposure to sweetened liquids and foods. Tooth decay can lead to pain and infection, poor eating habits, speech problems, early loss of primary teeth and costly dental treatment.

CAREGIVER TIPS FOR HEALTHY TEETH

Here are some caregiver tips to help keep young children's teeth healthy:

- Use food and drinks to nourish a child, not to pacify.
- Encourage use of open cups starting from six months of age and full transition to open cups can occur by 18 months of age.
- Serve water between meals and designated snack times.
- Do not allow a child to go to sleep with a bottle or sippy cup.
- Soothers should not be dipped in any sweetened substance.
- Foods high in sugar should be served only at meal times.
- Teeth should be cleaned twice daily by an adult.
- Give children healthy foods and snacks following "Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating".

DENTAL EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Untreated dental emergencies are considered medical neglect under the Child and Family Services Act and should be reported to the Children's Aid Society in your community.

Funding for families where the cost of treatment represents a financial hardship is available to those that qualify through the Healthy Smiles Ontario Program.

Call Your Health Connection at 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520, for further information about financial assistance.

Toothache

- Rinse with warm water to remove any food debris. If swelling is present, place cold compresses to the outside of the cheek. Do not place aspirin on the gum or tooth. The parent/guardian must take the child to a dentist for treatment.

Knocked Out Tooth

- Do not attempt to push a baby tooth back into position as this can damage the permanent tooth developing underneath. Place a permanent tooth in milk or wrap in a clean wet cloth, but do not clean the tooth. Take the child and tooth to the dentist immediately.

Broken Tooth

- Try to clean dirt or debris from the injured area with warm water. Place cold compresses on the face next to the injured tooth to minimize swelling. Take the child to the dentist immediately.

Bitten Tongue or Lip

- Apply direct pressure to bleeding area with a sterile or clean cloth. If swelling is present, apply cold compresses. If bleeding doesn't stop readily or the bite is severe, take the child to the hospital emergency room.

Possible Fractured Jaw

- If suspected, immobilize the jaw by any means and take the child the hospital emergency room.

TOOTH BRUSHING

The child care centre may or may not choose to have a tooth brushing program. It is important that infection control procedures are followed.

Here are some guidelines:

- Encourage children, who are old enough, to brush their teeth after meals.
- Ensure each child has his/her own toothbrush. Toothbrushes are NOT to be shared.
- Rinse toothbrushes well after use.
- Store toothbrushes so that they do not come in contact with one another and are able to air dry. Toothbrush bristles should not touch a “common surface” as they do when bristles sit on holders for two or more children.
- Hang toothbrushes from hooks which are about two inches apart and nailed into a strip of varnished wood which also keeps the brush away from a wall surface.
- Have only one row of toothbrushes as this prevents wet toothbrushes from dripping on one another.
- Put names or pictures of children above each toothbrush and label each toothbrush with an engraver (available at hardware stores).
- Consider NOT using toothpaste as there is less mess and brushes are easier to rinse.
- If toothpaste is used, avoid cross contamination by not applying toothpaste directly to the toothbrush. For children under the age of 3, an adult should dispense a very small amount of fluoridated toothpaste (size of a grain of rice) inside the lip of a small paper cup or on a small square of paper. The child would then “scoop” up the toothpaste using their toothbrush. Have the child spit out the toothpaste at the end. If the child is over 3 years of age then a pea sized amount of toothpaste should be used.
- Toothbrushes should be replaced every three or four months or if bristles are frayed.

DENTAL CARE

It is recommended by the dental community that children see a dental care provider by the age of one to be sure that good dental habits are established and to check for any problems developing. Regular dental visits should continue at least yearly after that.

HEALTH UNIT SERVICE FOR FAMILIES

Parents should be made aware of the following services which ensure that all preschool and school age children in Simcoe Muskoka have access to dental care:

A. Health Unit Dental Screenings

The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit provides free dental screenings for children. Appointments are arranged by calling the Oral Health department at 705-721-7520 extension #8804.

B. Preventive Services

Children at risk of tooth decay at the time of dental screening will be offered professionally applied topical fluoride. Families who would find it difficult to access care on their own may be eligible.

C. Dental Treatment Coverage

Children with urgent dental needs or whose family meets financial criteria may be eligible for free dental care. Parents/guardians should call the Oral Health program at 705-721-7520 extension #8804 for more information.

D. Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)

Children whose parents are receiving Ontario Works or assistance through the Ontario Works Disability Support Program have coverage for basic dental treatment with the Healthy Smiles Ontario Program. Children with special needs may also be enrolled in Healthy Smiles Ontario through ODSP even if their parents are not on the program. These children have dental benefits. Families should contact their caseworker if they have questions about their coverage.

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