

## DENTAL HYGIENE

AT CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL OF PITTSBURGH OF UPMC, we believe parents and guardians can contribute to the success of this procedure and invite you to participate. Please read the following information to learn about the procedure and how you can help.

### Fast Facts About Dental Hygiene Visits

- Dental hygiene cleanings and examinations are done while your child is awake.
- A dental hygienist, who is licensed by the state and knows everything about keeping the teeth and gums clean and healthy, will clean your child's teeth.
- The procedure usually takes 30 minutes.
- Your child may go home with restrictions if he or she receives fluoride.
- Your child will not be able to eat or drink for 30 minutes after receiving fluoride.
- You should follow up by scheduling another hygiene appointment for your child in 6 months.

### What is Dental Hygiene?

Dental hygiene (*HI-jean*) means taking care of your teeth, gums, and mouth to prevent dental problems. Most tooth decay and cavities are preventable with proper hygiene, diet, and nutrition. Brushing and flossing at home are two important parts of dental hygiene, along with seeing a dental hygienist and the dentist every 6 months. Taking good care of your child's mouth and learning how to remove plaque (PLACK) are the best ways to prevent cavities, infection, and diseases of the gums and teeth. Plaque is a thin layer of sticky film that coats the teeth. It contains bacteria and sugars, and can cause cavities, so it is important to remove it through brushing 2 times a day and flossing.

Proper dental care begins at birth. Even newborns and babies should have their gums and mouths gently washed with a damp wash cloth or piece of gauze after every feeding. Children are at high risk for developing cavities because they frequently eat and drink foods and liquids with lots of sugar, such as milk, juice, candy, and soda. When their teeth are not brushed and flossed often enough or the right way, left over sugar can cause tooth decay.

### What Happens During A Dental Hygiene Visit?

We want your child to have pleasant, relaxed, and comfortable visits to the dentist. The hygienist will explain everything that will be done during the examination and cleaning. We use age-



appropriate explanations, using a "show and tell" approach. For example, the hygienist might have young children count the number of teeth they have before beginning the cleaning. Your child will sit in a big comfortable chair that has a head rest and lots of room to stretch out. Next to the chair might be a little sink with a plastic or paper cup that can be used for rinsing while your child's teeth are being cleaned. Above the chair is a big bright light that helps the hygienist (HI-jenn-ist) get a good look into your child's mouth.

If the dentist has ordered x-rays (pictures), the hygienist will use a special x-ray camera to take them. A heavy vest will be placed over the chest area to protect the rest of your child's body from the x-rays when they are taken. The dental hygienist will put a piece of plastic that holds the x-ray film into your child's mouth. Your child will be asked to bite down gently on the plastic and sit very still for a few seconds while the x-ray is being taken. If a parent or guardian has accompanied the child to the exam room, he or she will be asked to leave momentarily while the x-ray is being taken. You may rejoin your child afterward. Dental x-rays are an important way to help the dentist check for cavities, bone loss, or other abnormalities that cannot be seen with the naked eye.

### What Happens During A Teeth Cleaning?

The hygienist will be wearing eye glasses, a mask over the nose and mouth, and gloves. The hygienist dresses this way to prevent passing germs on to your child. The first thing the hygienist will do is gently look at your child's teeth and gums to make sure everything is healthy. She will start the cleaning by removing any plaque that has formed around your child's teeth. The hygienist will use a tiny mirror to see all around the

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teeth during the cleaning, and will use a dental instrument called a scaler to scrape away the plaque from every tooth. During the cleaning, the hygienist will use "Mr. Thirsty," a small water fountain or squirter tube that sucks up saliva (spit.) Once the plaque is removed, your child's teeth will be brushed with a special toothbrush, flossed, and then fluoride will be applied to prevent cavities. Once she has finished the hygiene examination, she will explain the best way to brush and floss your child's teeth at home.

Your dentist will visit with you and your child afterward. He or she will do a brief examination and discuss any problems or questions you might have. The dentist also might discuss whether your child could benefit from applying a sealant. Sealants are usually applied on the permanent molars (back teeth) where cavities develop most often.

### A Parent's/Guardian's Role

The most important role of a parent or guardian is to help your child stay calm and relaxed before the procedure. The best way to help your child stay calm is for you to stay calm.

- You may bring along a "comfort" item — such as a favorite stuffed animal or "blankie"— for your child to hold before, during, and after the procedure.
- For very young children, one parent or guardian may remain with your child during the appointment. Other family members or guardians will be asked to remain in the waiting area.

### After the Dental Hygiene Visit

There are no food or activity restrictions after a cleaning unless your child has received a fluoride treatment. If your child receives a fluoride treatment, wait 30 minutes before giving him or her anything to eat or drink.

### At-Home Care and Follow-Up Visits

You will need to make an appointment to bring your child for regular dental hygiene visits every 6 months.

### When to Call the Dentist

Problems after a dental hygiene visit are very rare. If your child's gums are sensitive, Tylenol® will help with any discomfort. If your child experiences the following for more than 24-hours you should call your dentist:

- fever
- severe bleeding of the gums

If your child has either of these symptoms, you should call the Dental Clinic at 412-692-5440 immediately. If you are calling during the evening or on a weekend, please call the hospital at 412-692-5325 and ask to page the dental resident on call.



### Special Needs

If your child has any special needs or health issues that you feel the dentist needs to know about, please call 412-692-5440. It is important to notify us in advance about any special needs your child might have.

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To see the list of all available patient procedures descriptions, please visit [www.chp.edu/procedures](http://www.chp.edu/procedures).