Tooth Pain

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentists recommends that:

- All children have a dental exam at the time of first tooth eruption or by age 1.

- After age 3, all children should have a dental exam and cleaning every 6 months.

Teething

New teeth usually begin to erupt when babies are 4-6 months old. This process may continue until 2 or 3 years of age. Your baby may have swollen gums and fussy behavior. You may see small red bumps or blue spots on the gums. Usually medical care is not required for teething.

What can I do to care for my child's teeth?

It is important that you help your foster child care for her teeth between dental visits. Caring for your child's teeth at home will help keep your child from getting cavities and needing dental work.

- You should start gently brushing your baby's gums and teeth with water by at 6 months of age. Use a soft infant toothbrush or gauze.
- Brush your baby's teeth once a day until she is 2 years old. When your baby has 8 teeth, you can start using a child-sized toothbrush.
- After age 2, children need to brush their teeth at least twice a day. Start with a fluoride-free toothpaste until your child learns not to swallow the paste. After that, you should switch to a toothpaste that contains fluoride.
- Try to let your young child brush her own teeth, so that she learns this good habit.
- You should brush your child's teeth after she does it herself, until she knows how to do it well (and you are comfortable with her doing it herself).
- If you live in a community that does not have fluoride in the water, ask your doctor for a prescription for fluoride supplements.

Bottle Feeding:

- Try to stop bottle-feeding once your foster child is 1 year old.
- Teach her to use a sippy cup or a covered cup with a straw, until your child is ready for a regular cup.
- Do not put your foster child to bed with a bottle or sippy cup. This exposes your child's teeth to sugars, which will cause cavities. It also increases the risk of choking.

What can I do at home for teething?

- Rub your baby's gums with a clean finger, a cold spoon, or a cold wet cloth to ease the pain.
- Give your baby a hard teething ring. To prevent choking, do not tie the teething ring around your baby's neck.

The Facts:

Tooth pain is common and can be very distressing to children. In babies, pain may be caused by teething, as new teeth work their way through the gums. In older children, tooth pain is often caused by tooth decay (cavities). Tooth decay is a result of bacterial growth that occurs when teeth are exposed to liquids and foods other than water for long periods of time. Many foster children did not have good dental care prior to being in foster care, so they may already have cavities. To help keep your child's teeth healthy, you should make sure that he or she gets regular dental exams.