

Healthy Smiles, Happy Kids!

When your child looks in the mirror, is there a beautiful smile beaming back? A healthy mouth is a good reflection of a child's ability to eat and speak correctly. And a dazzling bright smile is invaluable in the development of a positive self image. These are the areas of focus during national Children's Dental Health Month (CDHM) which takes place every year in February.

Events during the month long celebration are designed to raise awareness in educators, children and their parents. The importance of good oral health habits, preventing tooth and gum problems, and maintaining routine professional care provide the framework for having a lifetime of good dental health. This is a terrific time to reassess your child's dental needs and to make arrangements for an examination by a licensed dentist. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends that all children have a first dental evaluation by 1 year old. In other words, first birthday...first visit!

Some general and family dentists make good attempts to offer "kid friendly" offices. If your dentist and staff welcome 1 year olds, schedule this important introductory visit where you are already part of a dental family. However, if you are seeking the care of a children's dental specialist, then you can establish a dental home for your child at the office of a Pediatric Dentist. Many parents choose a pediatric dentist much the same way that they choose a pediatrician for their child's medical care. No matter where you go, the dentist, team and environment should be structured to ensure that children feel safe, comfortable and important every step of the way.

Your child's first visit should be a non-threatening, positive experience. It's a time to be exposed to the sights and sounds of the dental environment in a comfortable way. The first visit allows the dentist to examine the child, become familiar with the parents' dental histories, to learn about the child's diet and feeding history and to connect the dots concerning breast/bottle use, pacifier use, and finger/thumb habits as they may be related to the toddler's oral growth and development. The information that is gathered helps the dentist counsel the parents and to recommend a course of action, including treatment if needed. Sometimes, merely demonstrating to parents the proper way to inspect their child's mouth and offering tips on tooth brushing and flossing is all that is needed.

During national CDHM, many of Florida's dentists and teams of dental hygienists and dental assistants volunteer their time and services to children in the underserved communities. These dedicated professionals provide dental health screenings, X-rays, cleanings, fillings, sealants and simple extractions. The Florida Dental Association, with the help of dental industry manufacturers and vendors, supply many of the neediest children with dental educational materials and dental hygiene products as well. Many of the free events take place locally as part of Project: Dentists Care, a charitable arm of the Florida Dental Association. All of the donated screening and treatment is part of a nationwide campaign called Give Kids A Smile. More information about access to these programs can be gotten by calling the local district dental component society at 305-667-3647.

Dr. Eric Lebowitz, a Pinecrest resident, is a Pediatric Dentist specializing in care for infants, children and teens. "First Birthday, First Dental Visit!" His private practice, Tooth Fairy-Land, is located near Baptist Hospital. You may contact him by calling 305-279-4312 or on-line at www.ToothFairy-Land.com