



**COUNTY OF SAN BERNARDINO  
PRESCHOOL SERVICES DEPARTMENT  
POLICY**

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**EFFECTIVE: 07-02-10**  
Updated

**SUBJECT: TOOTH BRUSHING AND GUM CLEANING**

**APPROVED: 07-02-10**

  
**BY: Ron Griffin, Director**

**PURPOSE**

For dental hygiene and health

**REFERENCE**

Head Start Performance Standards Subpart B: Early Childhood Development and Health Services Section 1304.23(b)(3) Nutritional Services.

**PROCEDURE**

**General Principles of Tooth Brushing**

- Regular tooth brushing with fluoride toothpaste is necessary to teach and reinforce oral health habits, as well as prevent gingivitis and tooth decay.
- An adult that can encourage and model appropriate brushing technique must always supervise tooth brushing. Using a soft bristle, place the brush at a 45 degree angle and brush back and forth sideways in short circular strokes, several times, using a gentle scrubbing motion and making sure to brush gums and tongue as well as teeth. Brush both inner and outer teeth.
- Offering children drinking water after snacks will counterbalance the cavity-causing effects of food.
- Plaque builds on any surface of a tooth that is not routinely brushed, eventually leading to cavities and gum disease.
- Children with disabilities should be supported with any needed adaptations.

**Age-Appropriate Tooth Brushing and Gum Cleaning**

**Infants through 18 Months**

- For a child with no teeth or budding teeth, to prevent baby bottle tooth decay, wipe the child's gum surfaces with warm water and gauze after each feeding. Wear nonporous gloves (change gloves between contact with each child) and wash hands before and after gum cleaning.
- Begin tooth brushing twice per day without toothpaste when the child's first tooth erupts. Hold a toothbrush to the tooth or teeth and brush all surfaces. Allow the child to assist.
- Educate staff and parents about ways to prevent baby-bottle decay (infant dental cavities).

### 18 Months to 3.5 Years Old

- Use only a pea-sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste. Take care not to touch the tube to any child's toothbrush. Try placing dabs onto wax paper or the side of a small paper cup.
- Usually, this age group can brush the front and side chewing surfaces of their own teeth. They should brush twice per day. Each time, model for them how to reach all surfaces and assist them to brush all surfaces.
- Allow children to rinse their mouths with water from their own paper cups after brushing. Spitting is better than swallowing toothpaste.
- Wash your hands before and after assisting each child.

### 3.5 Years to 5 Years

- Usually, this age group can brush almost all their own teeth but their technique is often inadequate to completely clean the teeth. Let children brush their own teeth. Each time, model how to brush missed surfaces and assist.
- Use a pea-sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste. Do not touch the tube to any child's toothbrush (see suggestion above).
- Let children rinse with water from individual paper cups after brushing. Spitting is better than swallowing toothpaste.
- Wash your hands before and after assisting each child.
- Never tap the brush on the sink
- Disinfect the sink/rinse after each child.