

Are you kissable?



FIRST, WHAT IS A CAVITY?

Tooth decay, or 'dental caries', occur when acid from within the mouth attacks the enamel and dentine of the teeth causing holes or cavities to form. The acid is produced by bacteria that are found within the plaque – a sticky and thin film that repeatedly forms over the teeth. When sugar is consumed it interacts with the bacteria within the plaque to produce acid. This acid is responsible for tooth decay because it slowly dissolves the enamel creating holes or cavities in the teeth. Tooth decay can lead to tooth abscesses, which may result in the tooth having to be removed.

Despite the decreasing levels of tooth decay over the past decades, it still remains one of the most common problems in the US, second only to the common cold. It is estimated that 1 in 3 adults suffers from dental caries and close to 1 in 4 children equally suffer from some form of tooth decay.

WHO IS AT RISK FOR CAVITIES?

Everyone is at risk of tooth decay, but children and adolescents are most at risk. Dental caries are the most common cause of tooth loss in young people [3]. Plaque begins to build up on teeth only 20 minutes after we begin eating and if it is not removed effectively, tooth decay starts. People who regularly consume sugar have a higher risk of developing dental caries, particularly if the food they eat is sticky or consumed in between mealtimes. Sugars-containing snacks and sugars-sweetened beverages have particularly bad effects on teeth. People who smoke and consume alcohol are also more at risk. The prevalence of dental caries is also associated with social factors – where adults from lower income households are more likely to suffer from dental caries than those from higher income households (37% compared with 26%).

ARE CAVITIES CONTAGIOUS?

It may be surprising to learn that tooth cavities spread and are contagious. Similar to catching a cold sore, you can also catch a cavity by swapping spit. Cavities are usually caused by sugar build up that decays teeth. However, studies have shown that cavities can be transmitted through close contact with another person who has poor oral hygiene. Indeed, studies have found that one person can develop a cavity on their tooth via kissing. This is especially common if their partner suffers from poor oral hygiene. This was found by evaluating kissing couples.

The precursors to cavities ride it out on the bacteria contained in saliva. So, when two people are kissing with vigour, they can transmit these harmful bacteria to one another. The same goes for mothers that get too close to their babies – they can spread a tooth cavity to the child.

In fact, infants and children are particularly vulnerable to cavity causing bacteria. In most cases where a child has a cavity, they've inherited it from their caregiver. One common way this can happen is when a parent tests the temperature of a child's food with their mouth.

Don't taste food yourself before feeding it to your baby. By doing this you enable the spread of germs which can lead to poor oral health!



Cavity care in this circumstance involves timely control of the colonisation of the cariogenic bacteria in the mouths of young children. In other words, brush their teeth right after eating to kill germs and bacteria found in the mouth.

30% of three-month-olds, 60% of six-month-olds, and 80% of two-year-olds were infected with *Streptococcus mutans*. This is a strain of bacteria involved in the process of tooth decay.

Researchers believe bacteria were passed to children by their parents or guardians, by kissing or sharing items. <https://www.actiononsugar.org/sugar-and-health/sugars-and-tooth-decay/>

CAVITY CARE

The best approach to reduce the risk of contagious cavities is preventative care. Avoid the use of shared utensils, straws and beverages. Brush you and your children's teeth regularly. By doing this, you help to avoid the spread of oral bacterium that can cause cavities to grow.

If your cavity is already unavoidable, it's certainly worth seeing us and discussing treatment options. Fluoride toothpaste treatments can sometimes help restore your tooth's enamel and very simply reverse a cavity in its early stages. You may need fillings, crowns, root canals or tooth extractions if not treated.

By taking preventative measures, you can avoid invasive and expensive dental treatments.

Contact Family Dental Care of Oak Park for all cavity inspections and general dental care. Our friendly team operate Monday-Saturday. We close late on Tuesdays and Thursdays – call us for a checkup today! Phone: 708-848-3727

HOW TO BRUSH

Hold the bristles gently against the outside of your top teeth, near the gum line, at about a 45-degree angle upward. Sweep the brush gently back and forth over teeth and gums in soft strokes, in order to make this technique "modified" once you complete the horizontal back and forth motions a couple of times along 1-2 teeth at a time, then sweep the brush up or down away from the gum line.



HOW TO FLOSS

Start with 18 inches of floss (floss the length of your arm) and wrap one end of the floss around your middle finger on your non dominant hand, then using your dominant hand holding the floss an inch away from your non dominant hand, you slip the floss in between two teeth gently sea sawing the floss between the teeth until you are in between the teeth, then you make a c shape with the floss and floss between the tooth and the gum on one side, moving the floss back up and then back down between the adjacent tooth and the gum creating the c shape again. When pulling the floss up from between your teeth make sure not to forget to wrap the piece of floss you just used around your finger on your non dominant hand once to make sure you have a new piece of the floss going in between the next set of teeth you will be flossing



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