**Why is oral health so important?**

**Oral health and school success are connected**

- Tooth decay is the most common chronic childhood disease.
- Kids miss 51 million hours of school every year due to oral health problems (many of which are easily preventable).
- Students who are absent miss critical instruction time, especially in early grades where reading skills are a focus.
- Kids who have experienced recent oral health pain are 4 times more likely to have lower grade point averages in high school than kids who haven’t.
- Kids with dental problems have trouble smiling, speaking, sleeping and learning at school.

**Finding and paying for dental care**

It’s important to find a dentist who makes your whole family feel comfortable. To find a dentist in your area, check out these websites:

- **Michigan Department of Community Health**
  - Find out in 30 minutes or less if you or your children are eligible for dental care coverage!
  - healthcare4mi.com/michild-web

- **Delta Dental of Michigan’s online dentist search tool**
  - www.deltadentalmi.com/findadentist

- **State of Michigan’s Oral Health Directory**

- **Michigan Dental Association**
  - www.smilemichigan.com/FindaDentist

- **Michigan Academy of Pediatric Dentistry**
  - michiganapd.org/?page_id=239

To download a copy of the entire *From Drool to School* book and to watch a cool 4-minute oral health video that your child will love, go to:

- www.deltadentalmi.com/brighterfutures

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Drool years

Newborns and infants

- No bottles in bed!

Milk, juice and formula contain sugars that can lead to decay.

- Keep baby’s gums clean and healthy—massage gums with a damp washcloth after each feeding to keep gums and mouth clean and healthy.

- Stop the spread of germs and cavity-causing bacteria—do not share cups, silverware, etc. with your baby.

- Teething can cause sore gums—try offering your baby something cool like a cold teething ring or wet washcloth to ease soreness.

- Visit the dentist early—your baby’s first visit should happen by his/her first birthday.

Preschool years

Toddlers and preschoolers

- Toothbrushing is important—use a smear of fluoridated toothpaste for children between the ages of 3–6 (rice-sized amount for children younger than 3) and a soft child-sized toothbrush. Brushing should begin when the first tooth erupts. Replace toothbrushes every 4 months.

- Visit the dentist regularly—your child should visit the dentist at least once a year for a checkup.

- Sucking can become a bad habit—wean your child off the bottle at around 12 to 18 months and encourage an end to thumb sucking and pacifier use before age 4.

- Sip all day, and the teeth will pay—don’t let your child carry around or nap with a sippy cup that contains juice, milk or other sweetened drinks as it will lead to cavities.

- Drink tap water—drinking fluoridated water is a great way to fight tooth decay and cavities. Because most bottled water does not contain fluoride, it’s better to drink tap water.

Elementary–aged children

- A healthy school lunch is important—be sure to pack fruits/veggies and protein such as peanut butter, cheese, turkey or roast beef. Avoid juice, sports drinks or soda pop—water is best.

- Protect teeth—kids who play sports should wear mouth guards.

- Sealants are a great way to prevent cavities—ask your dentist about them when you visit.

- Get ready for the tooth fairy—kids usually lose their baby teeth between the ages of 6–12.

- Stop the spread of germs—don’t share toothbrushes, toothpaste or bathroom drinking glasses, and wash hands before and after brushing.

- Keep your dentist’s phone number handy—dental emergencies are very common among active kids.

Get your child’s smile school-ready by making a dental visit part of your back-to-school routine.