

Performing an Oral Screening on a Child in a Medical Setting

The best time for HCPs to demonstrate proper oral care and to apply fluoride varnish is immediately following the oral screening at well-child visits, with the child still in the knee-to-knee position.

Recommended Sequence

1. Position the child in the knee-to-knee position so the child is laying across the lap of the HCP and parent/caregiver. Ask the parent to control the child's extremities while the oral soft tissues are examined.
2. Observe closely the child's head, neck, arms and legs for evidence of child abuse.
3. Lift the upper lip and then the lower lip to observe the anterior teeth and oral soft tissues (e.g., lips, cheeks, tongue, gums and palate).
4. For children who have posterior teeth, use a dental mirror or tongue blade to retract the tongue while examining the posterior teeth.
5. Observe closely the child's teeth for any of the below listed conditions.
 - Plaque accumulation
 - Tooth discolouration
 - Tooth malformation (i.e., developmental abnormalities)
 - Carious lesions
6. Observe closely all oral soft tissues for any of the below listed conditions.
 - Frenum attachments that may impede breastfeeding, drinking or speaking
 - Fibromas, viral-associated lesions, aphthous ulcers, mucous retention cysts, clefts
 - Inflamed or edematous gingiva (gum tissues)
7. Conduct a brief interview with the parent to determine the child's overall risk for caries, asking questions such as those listed below. Also consider using an age-appropriate caries-risk assessment tool (CAT; as discussed previously in this course).
 - Frequency and amount of snacks and beverages that contain sugar
 - Frequency of tooth-brushing and use of a fluoridated toothpaste and dental floss
 - The oral health (i.e., oral hygiene, incidence of caries and/or periodontal diseases) of parents/caregivers and siblings
8. Make the recommendations for caries prevention such as those listed below.
 - Limit snacking frequency and select healthy snacks such as fruits, vegetables, cheeses and meats
 - Limit consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages
 - Brush twice a day with a fluoridated toothpaste
 - Get regular professional applications of fluoride from trained HCPs in either a dentist's or physician's office
9. Discuss the findings of the oral screening with the parent/caregiver, and make a special effort to explain the significance of the findings.
10. Refer to an oral HCP if any of the below listed conditions are evident.
 - Issues with teeth or oral soft tissues
 - High risk for caries
 - Child has not received his/her first dental visit
 - Child has not received a dental exam by a dentist or dental hygienist within the previous 12 months

