

# The WIC Staff's Role in ECC Prevention & Early Intervention

Early Childhood Caries (ECC) is any tooth decay in a child under 6 years of age. While some children may only have one tooth that is decayed, and some may have multiple teeth that are decayed (as shown in the picture to the right) it is important to understand that tooth **decay in childhood is not normal and can be prevented.**

Early Childhood Caries is a devastating problem in young children. Not only can it cause pain and loss of teeth, but it also affects self esteem, speech development, nutrition, and school attendance. Preventing ECC is difficult because many things contribute to this disease process. The IHS uses the slogan **"Two is Too Late,"** which means that prevention must be implemented with pregnant women, infants, and young children. There's where **you** can help by providing positive oral health messages to parents, applying fluoride varnish at WIC, and referring children to the dentist.



The IHS has started a new initiative to draw attention to the problem of Early Childhood Caries, which afflicts more than half of Native American children. Below and on the back of this sheet is information on how you can help make a difference in our fight against ECC.

## Best Practices for 0-5 year olds



1. **Brushing twice daily** with fluoride toothpaste.
2. **Fluoride Varnish** applications 3-4 times a year.
3. **Offer healthy snacks** and avoid sweet drinks and foods.
4. **Early Access to Dental Care** may help keep children from having to be treated for severe decay in an operating room. Ask your dentist about caries stabilization.



*Together, we can make a difference!*

# What can WIC staff do to help?

## 1. Oral Health Assessment—WIC

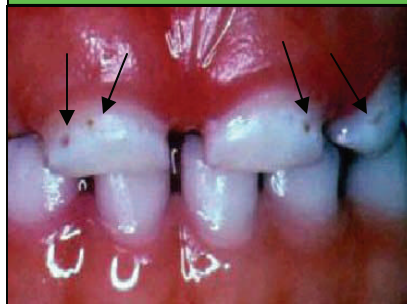
staff can do oral health assessments on young children to look for chalky spots, black spots in grooves, and cavities (holes in teeth). When doing a screening, wipe teeth with gauze and position the child as shown in this picture (called “knee to knee”). Below are some pictures that can help you. If you see any obvious cavities, refer the child to the dental clinic.



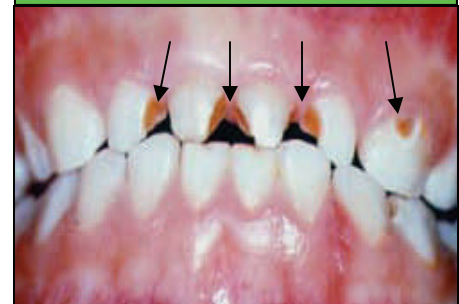
White spot lesions—  
APPLY FLUORIDE VARNISH



Early cavities (brown spots)—  
APPLY FLUORIDE VARNISH  
REFER TO DENTAL CLINIC



Severe decay (holes in teeth)—  
APPLY FLUORIDE VARNISH  
REFER TO DENTAL CLINIC



**2. Apply fluoride varnish—**Start by getting fluoride varnish, gauze, and gloves. Wipe all teeth dry with gauze and wipe varnish over all of the teeth, inside and out. Don't worry about getting it on the gums. It should only take a minute or less to apply varnish. Fluoride varnish should be applied 3-4 times each year to help prevent tooth decay and to stop existing decay from getting worse.



## 3. Provide Positive Oral Health Messages—

Take the time to talk to parents about the following:

- ◆ Brush twice daily with fluoride toothpaste beginning when the first tooth erupts.
- ◆ Apply 3-4 fluoride varnish treatments a year.
- ◆ Never put baby in bed with a bottle.
- ◆ Limit the amount and frequency of sugary foods and drinks.

The **IHS Early Childhood Caries Initiative** is a collaborative project that includes dental staff, medical staff, Community Health Representatives, Head Start, WIC, and other key stakeholders in the oral health of children.

- ◆ To take the online course “How to Apply Fluoride Varnish,” and for more information about the ECC Initiative, go to: <http://www.doh.ihs.gov/ecc>.