

# **A Parent's Guide to Dental Care for Children with Asthma**

*Children with asthma are at greater risk of getting cavities because of their inhaled medicine. Regular brushing and flossing are very important for children with asthma.*

**If your child has severe uncontrolled asthma, the dentist may not be able to treat him or her until it is controlled.**

**Children with asthma need to see a pediatric dentist regularly.**

A child should have his/ her first dental visit no later than 12 months of age. Your child's dentist will recommend how often he or she should go to the dentist.

**Children taking asthma medicine can have more cavities and gum disease.**

- The medicine makes your mouth dry and not have enough spit. Having a dry mouth creates bacteria that cause cavities.
- Dry mouth also makes plaque and tartar build up faster which can lead to gum disease.
- The medicine can also dissolve enamel on your teeth which can cause more cavities.
- Taking steroids can lead to thrush (white rash inside your mouth).

**Things you need to know and do with a child with asthma when visiting the dentist:**

- Always bring an inhaler.
- Sometimes the visit may trigger an asthma attack such as if your child is afraid of seeing the dentist or when he or she must lie back in the dental chair.
- There also may be mist in the air that can trigger an attack.

## **Prepare your child for a visit to the dentist:**

- Make sure your child takes his/ her medicine on schedule.
- Make sure he or she has a good night's rest before the appointment.

## **Questions to ask your child's dentist:**

- Can my child get the laughing gas if they are afraid?  
Maybe. Laughing gas (nitrous oxide) is safe for most children with mild and moderate asthma.
- Can my child be sedated for dental care?  
Maybe. Some children with mild asthma may be able to be sedated if they are scared. Some medicines, such as opioids, cannot be used for children with asthma. Your child's dentist may talk with your child's doctor to decide if your child can get sedation.
- Does my child need prescription fluoride products?  
Maybe. The dentist will decide based on a dental exam and x-rays.
- Which pain medicine can my child take for a toothache?  
Acetaminophen (Tylenol). Talk to your child's doctor before giving your child ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin). Ibuprofen may increase chance of an asthma episode.

## **How can I prevent cavities in my child?**

- Brush your child's teeth every morning and every night with a soft toothbrush.
- Use toothpaste with fluoride in it and has the ADA seal of approval on the tube.
- Floss after brushing at night..
- Drink fluoridated water.
- Do not drink juices, sodas, or sports drinks often.
- Stay away from foods that have added sugar. In-between meal snacks should not be sweet treats.

### **Questions your child's dentist might ask you:**

- Who is your child's pediatrician (or pulmonologist) and how can I get in touch with him or her?
- What medicines does your child take? What are the dosages? How does your child take the medicine (inhaled, liquid, pills)?
- Does your child have any drug and food allergies?
- How often does your child have asthma attacks? When was the last one?
- Does your child have nighttime asthma attacks?
- Have you had to take your child to the emergency room for asthma attacks? Was he or she admitted to the hospital?
- What are the known triggers for your child's asthma, such as certain foods, seasonal changes or exercise?
- Does your child have an inhaler? Do you have it with you at this appointment?
- How do you manage an asthma attack at home or at school?
- Has your child had any problems when having dental work done in the past?
- Is your child afraid of going to the dentist?

### **Questions you should ask your child's pediatrician:**

- Does my child need any extra protection while receiving dental care?
- Is there anything the dentist should do differently for my child?

### **How often should my child see the dentist?**

Most children should see the dentist every 6 months. However, if your child is at high risk for dental caries, the dentist may recommend more frequent visits, such as every 3 or 4 months.

Children with asthma can get cavities, just like children who do not have asthma. Dental cavities are preventable by ensuring a healthy, low-sugar diet and regular brushing and flossing.

**How to find a pediatric dentist:**

American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry: [www.aapd.org](http://www.aapd.org)

American Board of Pediatric Dentistry: [www.abpd.org](http://www.abpd.org)

Additional Information on Asthma in Children:

<https://medlineplus.gov/asthmainchildren.html>

**Note:** The information you see describes general oral health information for children with asthma, but it does not apply to everyone. This information is not medical advice. Please contact a healthcare provider if your child has a medical problem. If you think your child may have a medical emergency, please call your child's doctor or an emergency number immediately.

Text by Priyanshi Ritwik, DDS, MS

Edited by Julie Schiavo, MLIS, AHIP