Dental Guidelines for Your Child
Adapted from the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD)

When should my child first go to the dentist?
Your child should visit a pediatric dentist when the first tooth comes in, usually 6-12 months. This first visit is usually to let your child get used to the dentist.

How can I prevent tooth decay in my child?

Birth to 3 years
- Babies should not fall asleep with a bottle containing anything other than water. Juice, milk and formula all contain sugar and can increase the risk of tooth decay.
- You can start by cleaning your baby’s gums with a cloth and water, even before they have any teeth.
- Give your toddler liquids in a cup rather than a bottle. Drinking from a bottle increases risk of tooth decay.
- Once teeth start to appear, clean them with a soft toothbrush twice a day, especially at night. Until your child can spit, they should not use toothpaste with fluoride. It’s important that children learn early not to swallow toothpaste.
- Once your child can spit (about 3 years old), you can use a “smear” (a very thin layer of toothpaste that covers less than half the bristle surface) of fluoridated toothpaste.
- Sharing utensils or cleaning a pacifier with your mouth can transmit bacteria that cause tooth decay to your child.

Ages 3 to 6 years
- Give your child healthy foods to eat. These include whole grains, vegetables, and fruits.
- Children can start learning to brush their own teeth, and often can brush their own teeth by age 4. They should still have supervision to assess for adequate cleaning and rinsing after brushing.
- A child’s teeth should be flossed as soon as they start touching each other. Talk to your child’s dentist for tips on how to floss your child’s teeth.

Ages 6 to 16 years
- After your child’s permanent teeth start to appear, talk to your child’s dentist about having dental sealant placed on molars. This can help prevent tooth decay.
- Encourage healthy diet and dental habits, as this leads to a healthy mouth and a healthy smile!

What is fluoride and how does it prevent cavities?
Fluoride is important for growing teeth because it mixes with and strengthens tooth enamel, the hard protective coating on your teeth. Even after teeth are formed, fluoride mixes with saliva to protect your teeth from sugars, plaque and natural bacteria in your mouth. Infant formulas may contain fluoride. Bottled, filtered and well waters contain varying amounts of fluoride.

When should you call for help?
Call your dentist now or seek immediate medical care if:
- Your child has signs of infection, such as:
  - Increased pain, swelling, warmth, or redness.
  - Red streaks on the gum leading from a tooth.
  - Pus draining from the gum around a tooth.
  - A fever.
  - Your child has a toothache.