

ERUPTION OF YOUR CHILD'S TEETH

The eruption of primary teeth (also known as deciduous or baby teeth) follows a similar developmental timeline for most children. A full set of primary teeth begins to grow beneath the gums during the **fourth month of pregnancy**. For this reason, a nourishing prenatal diet is of paramount importance to the infant's teeth, gums, and bones.

Generally, the **first primary tooth breaks through the gums between the ages of six months and one year**. By the **age of three years old most children have a "full" set of twenty primary teeth**. The American Dental Association (ADA) encourages parents to make a "well-baby" appointment with a pediatric dentist approximately six months after the first tooth emerges. Pediatric dentists communicate with parents and children about prevention strategies, emphasizing the importance of a sound, "no tears" daily home care plan.

Although primary teeth are deciduous, they facilitate speech production, proper jaw development, good chewing habits - and the proper spacing and alignment of adult teeth. Caring properly for primary teeth helps defend against painful tooth decay, premature tooth loss, malnutrition, and childhood periodontal disease.

In what order do primary teeth emerge?

As a general rule-of-thumb, the first teeth to emerge are the central incisors (very front teeth) on the lower and upper jaws (6-12 months). These (and any other primary teeth) can be cleaned gently with a soft, clean cloth to reduce the risk of bacterial infection. The central incisors are the first teeth to be lost, usually between 6 and 7 years of age.

Next, the lateral incisors (immediately adjacent to the central incisors) emerge on the upper and lower jaws (9-16 months). These teeth are lost next, usually between 7 and 8 years of age. First molars, the large flat teeth towards the rear of the mouth then emerge on the upper and lower jaws (13-19 months). The eruption of molars can be painful. Clean fingers, cool gauzes, and teething rings are all useful in soothing discomfort and soreness. First molars are generally lost between 9 and 11 years of age.

Canine (cuspid) teeth then tend to emerge on the upper and lower jaws (16-23 months). Canine teeth can be found next to the lateral incisors, and are lost during preadolescence (10-12 years old). Finally, second molars complete the primary set on the lower and upper jaw (23-33 months). Second molars can be found at the very back of the mouth, and are lost between the ages of 10 and 12 years old.

What else is known about primary teeth?

Though each child is unique, baby girls generally have a head start on baby boys when it comes to primary tooth eruption. Lower teeth usually erupt before opposing upper teeth in both sexes.

Teeth usually erupt in pairs – meaning that there may be months with no new activity and months where two or more teeth emerge at once. Due to smaller jaw size, primary teeth are smaller than permanent teeth, and appear to have a whiter tone. Finally, an interesting mixture of primary and permanent teeth is the norm for most school-age children.

If you have questions or concerns about primary teeth, please contact your pediatric dentist.