

# Parents begin dental care at an early age

By Dipika J. Shah

**F**ebruary is Children's Dental Health Month. The American Dental Association started the first day-long observance on February 8, 1949. By 1955 this one-day event became a week-long celebration. In 1981, it became a month-long observance.

The celebration has also grown from two-city event, in 1941, to a nationwide program.

The local dental society has been very active for many years with different activities and events about dental health issues.

As we approach the 21st century, society is experiencing many scientific and technological breakthroughs, leading to higher life expectancy and better oral health care. Intraoral cameras, magnification, better lighting systems, air abrasion systems, a new generation of bonding materials, fluoride and laser dentistry have dramatically improved the oral health of our children.

Here are some things parents should keep in mind when dealing with oral care issues for children:

**Baby bottle tooth decay:** This develops by frequently giving a bottle of milk, juice, formula or any sweetened liquid to comfort the baby. If sugary liquid is allowed to remain in the mouth, bacteria use this sugar to produce acid, which attacks teeth and causes cavities. You can prevent this by watching what you feed your baby between regular feedings and wiping teeth with a damp washcloth after the feeding. Even though the child's primary teeth will eventually be replaced with the permanent, primary teeth are very important for proper chewing, speaking, appearance and proper eruption of permanent teeth.

**Seal out tooth decay:** Most tooth decay occurs on the chewing surfaces of the back molars because they have irregular surfaces with pits and grooves, which tend to trap food and bacteria.

Sealant is a thin plastic coating, which flows into these pits and grooves and coats them so those bacteria cannot cause decay. The teeth most likely to benefit are the molars just after they

ly, there are no shots or drilling involved. You can avoid more costly procedures later.

**Play safe — wear a mouth guard:** More than 5 million teeth will be knocked out at sporting events this year alone. Don't let it happen to you or your loved ones.

Everyone from the littlest child playing soccer to professional athletes can play hard but play safe with a custom fitted mouth guard. They not only prevent tooth and jaw injuries, but also protect against brain concussions. A properly fitted mouth guard must be comfortable, tear resistant, odorless, tasteless and should not be bulky. They should also cause minimum interference with speaking or breathing. Dental injuries are the most common type of oral facial injury sustained during sports. An athlete is 60 times more likely to sustain damage to the teeth when not wearing a mouth guard.

The cost of dental injuries is significantly higher than the cost of the mouth guard. The cost of replanting a tooth and follow up treatment is about \$5,000.

The chance of athlete having dental injuries in a lifetime of activity is 33-56 percent. Mouth guards are for all age group athletes and for all the contact sports.

**General tips for parents:** Provide a healthy, nutritionally well-balanced diet with healthy snacks to keep teeth healthy. Brush baby's teeth as soon as the first tooth comes in. Children should take their first trip to the dentist at about two or three years of age, when all 20 baby teeth have erupted. Put only water in the nap time or bedtime bottle. Start flossing teeth as soon as two teeth begin to touch. Make sure your child gets fluoride needed to reduce decay. Remember, talk to your dentist about sealant and get a mouth guard made by your dentist if your child is involved with contact sport. Good oral health starts in infancy and continues throughout life. In your child's early years, you must provide good dental care, and as the child grows you need to instruct, monitor and motivate your child to help maintain good oral habits.

*Dr. Dipika J. Shah's practice is located at 723 North Beers St. in Holmdel. Her office*