

Fluoride Varnish: What Parents Need to Know



Healthy gums and teeth are important to your child's overall health. This is why your child's doctor will talk with you about [good dental habits](#) even before your child's first tooth appears.

Once your child has a tooth, we recommend that your child receive fluoride varnish treatments in the pediatrician's office or at the dentist to help [prevent tooth decay](#). This can be done 2 to 4 times per year. In most cases, it is covered by your health insurance, and does not require a co-pay.

You can schedule a fluoride varnish visit every 3-6 months using the online scheduler. It is at the bottom of the list of available services.

Read on for more information from the American Academy of Pediatrics about fluoride varnish.

What is Fluoride Varnish?

Fluoride varnish is a dental treatment that can help prevent tooth decay, slow it down, or stop it from getting worse. Fluoride varnish is made with fluoride, a mineral that can strengthen tooth enamel (outer coating on teeth).

Keep in mind that fluoride varnish treatments cannot completely prevent cavities. Fluoride varnish treatments can best help prevent decay when a child is also brushing using the right amount of toothpaste with fluoride, flossing regularly, getting regular dental care, and eating a healthy diet.

Is Fluoride Varnish Safe?

Fluoride varnish is safe and used by dentists and doctors all over the world to help prevent tooth decay in children. Only a small amount is used, and hardly any fluoride is swallowed. It is quickly applied and hardens. Then it is brushed off after 4 to 12 hours.

Some brands of fluoride varnish make teeth look yellow. Other brands make teeth look dull. However, the color of your child's teeth will return to normal after the fluoride varnish is brushed off. Most children like the taste.

How is Fluoride Varnish Put on the Teeth?

Fluoride varnish is painted on the top and sides of each tooth with a small brush. It is sticky but hardens once it comes in contact with saliva. Your child may feel the hardened varnish with his tongue but will not be able to lick the varnish off.

It does not hurt when the varnish is applied. However, young children may still cry before or during the procedure. Fortunately, brushing on the varnish takes only a few minutes. Also, applying the varnish may be easier when a child is crying because his mouth will be slightly open.

You may be asked to hold your child in your lap while you are placed knee-to-knee with the person applying the varnish.

How Do I Care for My Child's Teeth After Fluoride Varnish is Applied?

- Your child can eat and drink right after the fluoride varnish is applied. But only give your child soft foods and cold or warm (not hot) foods or liquids.
- Do not brush or floss teeth for at least 4 to 6 hours. Your child's doctor may tell you to wait until the next morning to brush or floss. Remind your child to spit when rinsing, if he knows how to spit.

Additional Information:

Why do this?

While it is commonly recognized as the most common chronic disease of childhood, tooth decay is almost 100 percent preventable. Preventing costly and painful tooth decay not only improves quality of life, but also long-term overall health. Children who received four or more varnish treatments before the age of 3 1/2 show a 17 percent reduction in caries-related treatment*.

Through **topical mechanisms**, the **main effect**, fluoride works by:

- Inhibiting tooth demineralization
- Enhancing remineralization
- Inhibiting bacterial metabolism

Why do children need fluoride?

Fluoride is an important mineral for all children. Bacteria in the mouth combine with sugars and produce acid that can harm tooth enamel and damage teeth. Fluoride protects teeth from acid damage and helps reverse early signs of decay. Make sure your children are drinking plenty of water and brushing with toothpaste that has fluoride in it.

Is fluoridated water safe for my children?

Yes. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), along with the American Dental Association (ADA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), agree that water fluoridation is a safe and effective way to prevent tooth decay.

Should I mix infant formula with fluoridated water?

According to the ADA, it is safe to use fluoridated water to mix infant formula. The risk of mixing infant formula with fluoridated water is mild fluorosis (see below for more information on this condition). However, if you have concerns about this, talk with your pediatrician or dentist.

What if I prefer not to use fluoridated water for infant formula?

If you prefer not to use fluoridated water with formula, you can:

- Breastfeed your baby.
- Use bottled or purified water that has no fluoride with the formula.
- Use ready-to-feed formula that does not need water to be added.

When should my child start using fluoride toothpaste?

The AAP and the ADA recommend using a “smear” of toothpaste on children once the first tooth appears and until your child is 3. Once your child has turned 3, a pea-sized amount can be used.

What is dental fluorosis and will fluoridated water mixed with infant formula increase the risk?

Although using fluoridated water to prepare infant formula might increase the risk of dental fluorosis, most cases are mild.

Fluorosis usually appears as very faint white streaks on the teeth. Often it is only noticeable by a dental expert during an exam. Mild fluorosis is not painful and does not affect the function or health of the teeth.

Once your child's adult teeth come in (usually around age 8), the risk of developing fluorosis is over.

Source: [American Academy of Pediatrics](#)