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## **Early childhood tooth decay is a widespread disease that can be reduced with early diagnosis.**

Prince Edward Island Dentists to introduce “Free First Visit” dental program for all children up to age three.

The prevalence of tooth decay in North American preschool children has actually increased despite advances in dental prevention. Any child under 6 years of age who experiences cavities in their primary teeth is considered to have Early Childhood Caries (ECC), more commonly known as tooth decay or cavities.

Preschool children with ECC must be treated under general anesthetic in the operating room at great public expense. There is also the pain and discomfort that the child must endure and difficulty in getting operating room time to do the necessary work.

Education and intervention have been shown to reduce the incidence of cavities among children. Every parent should know that ECC is entirely preventable and even reversible when diagnosed early enough. **“If we can prevent or delay decay from occurring during preschool, we set a good foundation for a lifetime of good oral health.”** says **DAPEI President, Dr. Travis McLean**. The Canadian Dental Association has a position statement that the timing of a child’s first dental visit should be within six months of the eruption of the first tooth or by one year of age. As the Children’s Dental Program on PEI does not cover children until age three, the DAPEI believes that it would be great to model other provinces and have a program for Island infants. Much of the material for this initiative was provided courtesy of the Manitoba Dental Association



**“That’s why starting April 1st, to coincide with national Oral Health Month, your PEI Dentists will introduce the “Free First Visit” dental program to address Early Childhood Caries and much more.” The program benefits children under the age of three and offers a free first dental examination through participating dental offices.**

During the Free First Visit, the dentist and their oral health team will examine and assess the oral health of the child; recommend treatment if necessary to address tooth decay or cavities; inform and educate parents on their role in maintaining good oral health of their child; provide a tour of the dental office; introduce dentistry to a child in a pleasant and non-threatening manner and establish a healthy relationship with the dentist that will hopefully carry on for a lifetime.

The key benefits of the program include the opportunity for the dentist to assess the oral health of the child and detect ECC at an early stage, intercept behavior that is potentially damaging to the child’s oral health and provide parents with valuable information about prevention.

Contact your family dentist or go to [www.dapei.ca](http://www.dapei.ca) for more information.