

Primary care docs should play role in kids' dental health, experts say

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Government-appointed panel says family physicians can apply fluoride to children's teeth to prevent decay.

(HealthDay)—When it comes to the care of your children's teeth, dentists aren't the only experts who can help.

New recommendations from a government [advisory panel](#) urge primary care doctors to play a part in preventing tooth decay in the young.

The U.S. [Preventive Services](#) Task Force, an independent expert panel, advises that primary care physicians use fluoride varnish and oral fluoride supplements to help prevent early tooth decay in children.

"Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease in American children, but only about one out of four children under 6 years old visit a dentist,"

task force chair Dr. Virginia Moyer said in a statement released by the panel on Monday. "Fortunately, evidence shows that primary care clinicians can play an important role in helping to reduce tooth decay, substantially improving children's health."

The task force advised that doctors provide fluoride supplements, such as drops, tablets or lozenges, to children between 6 months and 5 years old whose water supply does not have enough fluoride. They should also apply fluoride varnish to the teeth of all children, regardless of how much fluoride is in their [drinking water](#).

According to the task force, these steps can help ward off the serious health complications associated with tooth decay such as pain, loss of teeth and [cavities](#) later in life. Tooth decay can also affect children's growth, speech, [school attendance](#) and appearance, the experts noted.

"Evidence shows that both fluoride varnish and oral fluoride supplements can help prevent tooth decay in young children," panel member Dr. Glenn Flores said in the news release. "These interventions are more vital than ever because, after decades of decline, the rate of tooth decay in children is rising, particularly in those 2 to 5 years old. Preventing this disease is critical to children's well-being."

Before a final recommendation is made, the task force is providing the public the opportunity to comment on the draft report and recommendation statement until June 17.

The panel noted there not yet enough evidence to determine if regular screening for tooth decay by [primary care physicians](#) would improve outcomes among children.

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics provides more information on [children's oral health](#).

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