

# Dental care for kids: Urgent vs. emergent situations

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It's always stressful when a child is experiencing dental pain or trauma. In honor of Children's Oral Health Month, the team at UConn Pediatric Dentistry has put together some things to keep in mind during these

difficult situations.

The information included here is not intended or implied as a substitute for professional medical or dental advice, diagnosis, or treatment. When in doubt, always reach out to a dental provider.

## **What is a dental home?**

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) considers a "dental home" an ongoing relationship between a dentist and a patient. A dental home is where your [child](#) receives comprehensive treatment. A dental home should be "continuously available, coordinated, and family-centered." The AAPD recommends that parents seek to establish a dental home for their children no later than 12 months of age.

## **Why is it important that my child has a dental home?**

Regular dental check-ups are vital to ensure that your child's teeth and mouth are healthy. A dentist can educate parents and help lay the foundation for good oral hygiene practices at home. Dentists can often diagnose and treat cavities and dental issues before they start causing [pain](#) or other symptoms. Having a regular dentist at a dental home is one of the most important things you can do to help prevent dental emergencies and ensure you have a plan in place if an emergency occurs.

## **When should I contact my dentist for an urgent dental need?**

It's also valuable to have a dental home for your child where you can reach out if you have any concerns. Your child's dentist will be familiar with his or her history and dental needs. For instance, you should reach out to your child's dentist if you notice a cavity or sore on the gums or if

your child is experiencing dental sensitivity or discomfort. Your regular dental provider can assist with any pain from teething or wisdom teeth. Finally, your child's dentist will be your first point of contact if your child experiences dental trauma.

Some reasons that you might urgently contact your dentist could include:

- When you notice a cavity
- When your child has pain from a cavity
- If you see a pimple or red bump on your child's gums
- If your child has pain in the back of their mouth that might be from [wisdom teeth](#)
- When your child chips a [tooth](#)
- Loose or "pokey" orthodontic wires

## **My child is in pain, but their dentist's office is closed! What should I do?**

When your child has a dental home, their dentist will typically have an after-hours line you can call for urgent issues. It can be tricky to determine when to contact your child's dentist. In situations that are not life-threatening or time-sensitive, it's always best to check in with your dentist before taking your child to the [emergency room](#).

## **How can I alleviate my child's pain/discomfort until I can get an appointment with their dentist?**

Over-the-counter pain medications such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen are recommended for tooth or gum pain. Follow the dosing on the package based on your child's age and weight. Topical anesthetic gels are not recommended. Room-temperature soft foods are often easiest for kids to tolerate when they have [dental pain](#). It is also more comfortable

to chew on the side of the mouth away from the tooth in pain. Eating or drinking hot, cold, or sugary food and beverages might cause discomfort from cavities; avoiding these triggers can help avoid exacerbating the pain.

## **My child just knocked out a baby tooth. What should I do?**

Your first step is to contact your dentist as soon as possible. Baby teeth are not reimplanted after they have been knocked out. Rinse your child's mouth out with water and apply a cold compress to their lips or cheeks to avoid swelling. Our main goal is to act quickly to avoid infection and decrease your child's discomfort.

## **My child just knocked out a permanent tooth. What should I do?**

Immediately try to find the knocked-out tooth. If you can locate it, avoid touching the root and try repositioning it back into the tooth socket. Place the tooth in Hank's Balanced Salt Solution or a Save-a-Tooth kit, which are both available over the counter. You can also place the tooth/teeth in milk. The main goal is to keep the tooth moist, but we discourage placing the tooth in water. Time is of the essence with a knocked-out permanent tooth, so head immediately to the dentist or emergency room if the injury occurs after business hours.

## **When should you take your child to the emergency department?**

You should visit your nearest [emergency department](#) if your child is facing a life-threatening condition. You should also use the emergency

room to treat time-sensitive dental trauma if you cannot reach your child's [dentist](#).

Life-threatening dental conditions can include:

- A dental infection that has spread throughout the body with symptoms such as:
  - High fever (102–104°F)
  - Dehydration
  - Changes in mental state
  - Facial swelling
  - Fatigue
  - Nausea or vomiting
- Difficulty breathing or swallowing due to facial swelling
- Uncontrolled bleeding
- A dislodged intraoral appliance (such as a removable retainer) that is blocking the patient's airway or was swallowed
- Severe facial trauma

Time-sensitive dental trauma can include:

- Knocked-out permanent teeth
- Permanent teeth that are loosened or out of normal position in the jaw and need to be stabilized
- Chipped dental teeth with pink visible or bleeding from inside the tooth
- A broken jaw
- Cuts of the tongue, cheeks, or lips that are bleeding uncontrollably and may require stitches

Provided by University of Connecticut

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