

Topical oral syrup prevents early childhood caries

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Dental researchers at the University of Washington have reported a significant reduction of tooth decay in toddlers who were treated with the topical syrup xylitol, a naturally occurring non-cavity-causing sweetener. Their results were presented today during the 86th General Session of the International Association for Dental Research.

Source: International & American Association for Dental Research

In a recent clinical trial in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, children 6 to 15 months old were given oral doses of xylitol in fruit-flavored syrup daily to determine whether the substance can prevent early-childhood tooth decay, or "caries".

Researchers reported that nearly 76% of the children in the group who received xylitol were free of tooth decay by the end of the study, compared with 48% of the children in the group that did not receive the substance.

The Marshall Islands in the Pacific were chosen for the study because it is an area where childhood tooth decay is a serious public health problem. The average child entering Head Start at age 5 has 6.8 cavities—two to three times the rate in a typical mainland community. Researchers came from the Northwest/Alaska Center to Reduce Oral Health Disparities and the Department of Dental Public Health Sciences at the University of Washington, Seattle.

Xylitol can be administered in the form of chewing gum, lozenges, or syrup. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved xylitol's use in food since 1963 and classifies the substance as safe.

According to researchers, at the end of the trial nearly 76% of the children in the study group were caries-free, compared with 48% in a comparable group that did not receive treatment.

Xylitol is a five-carbon sugar alcohol that is used as a sugar substitute.

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