

## TEACHING TIPS: DENTAL HEALTH

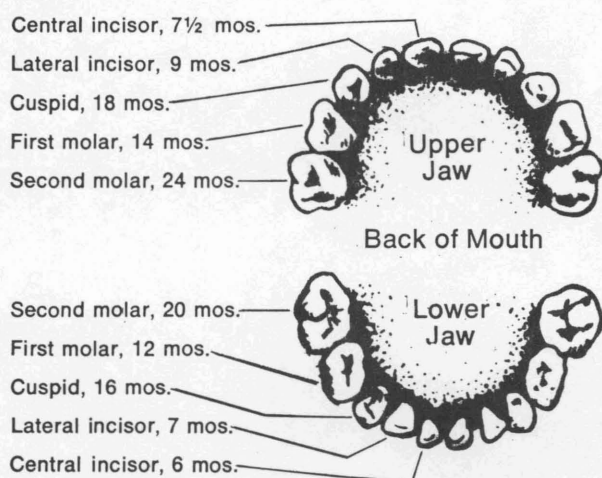
Some interesting facts about teeth:

- Teeth begin to form in the fetus (unborn baby) just 3 months after conception.
- The average person has 32 permanent teeth.
- An average 16-year-old has 10 cavities.
- By the age of 65, half of the people have no natural teeth.

Proper care of the teeth begins before a person is born. A pregnant woman who eats well-balanced meals is helping her future baby to have good teeth. If you are working with a pregnant woman, be sure to mention this important fact.

### PRIMARY TEETH

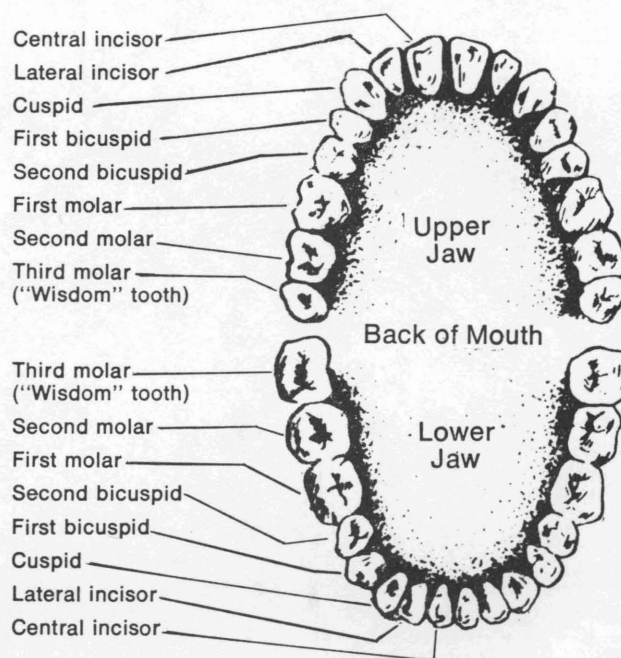
The primary teeth start to come in when the child is 6 to 8 months old. When the child is about 2 to 2½ years, the complete set of 20 temporary teeth are in.



This first group of teeth will be replaced by permanent teeth. It is important that these temporary teeth are cared for properly. They need to be cleaned regularly. Encourage families with small children to start cleaning the teeth as soon as the teeth come in. Stress the fact that *preventing* dental problems is cheaper and less painful than having cavities filled. Encourage young children to get into the habit of cleaning their teeth. This is one habit that is good for them!

### PERMANENT TEETH

The first permanent teeth start to come in when a child is 6 or 7 years old. There are a total of 32 permanent teeth. All but four are



usually in by age 12 or 13. The last four come in at the very back of the mouth at about 17 to 21 years of age. These are called "wisdom" teeth because people used to connect that time with a child becoming an adult.

Talk to your families about why they think it is important to have good teeth. Some reasons are mentioned in the handout. The homemaker may tell you about someone in her family who had a toothache, cavities or other problems. You can explain how the problem might have been avoided by good dental health habits.

One of our purposes in encouraging people to take care of their teeth is to show them the important role they play in their own dental health. It is up to the individual to take the time and effort to clean his or her teeth. Stress the fact that it takes very little time. Teeth can be cleaned well in only a few minutes. And the reward is tremendous—bright, sparkling,

healthy teeth! If a person does not take care of his one set of permanent teeth, the result may be a set of false teeth.

You may wish to share an old saying with the families you are working with:

"Be true to your teeth

or

They will be false to you."

This information was prepared by Carla Shearer, Extension health education specialist, The Texas A&M University System.

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