

Fluoride Varnish: What Parents Need to Know



Healthy gums and teeth are important to your child's overall health. This is why your child's doctor will talk with you about [good dental habits](#) even before your child's first tooth appears.

Once your child has a tooth, your doctor may recommend that your child receive fluoride varnish treatments in the pediatrician's office to help [prevent tooth decay](#). This can be done 2 to 4 times per year. The number of treatments depends on how likely it is that your child may get a cavity.

Pediatricians are trained to apply fluoride varnish because many young children do not see or have access to a dentist until they are older. If your child is seeing a dentist at a young age, as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics, fluoride varnish may be applied in a dental office instead.

Read on for more information from the American Academy of Pediatrics about fluoride varnish.

What is Fluoride Varnish?

Fluoride varnish is a dental treatment that can help prevent tooth decay, slow it down, or stop it from getting worse. Fluoride varnish is made with fluoride, a mineral that can strengthen tooth enamel (outer coating on teeth).

Keep in mind that fluoride varnish treatments cannot completely prevent cavities. Fluoride varnish treatments can best help prevent decay when a child is also brushing using the right amount of toothpaste with fluoride, flossing regularly, getting regular dental care, and eating a healthy diet.

Is Fluoride Varnish Safe?

Fluoride varnish is safe and used by dentists and doctors all over the world to help prevent tooth decay in children. Only a small amount is used, and hardly any fluoride is swallowed. It is quickly applied and hardens. Then it is brushed off after 4 to 12 hours.

Some brands of fluoride varnish make teeth look yellow. Other brands make teeth look dull. However, the color of your child's teeth will return to normal after the fluoride varnish is brushed off. Most children like the taste.

How is Fluoride Varnish Put on the Teeth?

Fluoride varnish is painted on the top and sides of each tooth with a small brush. It is sticky but hardens once it comes in contact with saliva. Your child may feel the hardened varnish with his tongue but will not be able to lick the varnish off.

It does not hurt when the varnish is applied. However, young children may still cry before or during the procedure. Fortunately, brushing on the varnish takes only a few minutes. Also, applying the varnish may be easier when a child is crying because his mouth will be slightly open.

You may be asked to hold your child in your lap while you are placed knee-to-knee with the person applying the varnish.

How Do I Care for My Child's Teeth After Fluoride Varnish is Applied?

Here are general guidelines on how to care for your child's teeth after fluoride varnish is applied. Check with your child's doctor for any other special instructions.

- Your child can eat and drink right after the fluoride varnish is applied. But only give your child soft foods and cold or warm (not hot) foods or liquids.
- Do not brush or floss teeth for at least 4 to 6 hours. Your child's doctor may tell you to wait until the next morning to brush or floss. Remind your child to spit when rinsing, if he knows how to spit.

Remember:

Steps to good dental health include:

- Regular care by a [dentist trained to treat young children](#)
- Getting enough [fluoride](#)
- [Regular brushing](#) and flossing
- Eating right

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all infants receive oral health risk assessments by 6 months of age. Infants at higher risk of early dental caries should be referred to a dentist as early as 6 months of age and no later than 6 months after the first tooth erupts or 12 months of age (whichever comes first) to establish their [dental home](#). Every child should have a dental home established by 12 months of age.

Additional Information:

- [Water Fluoridation](#)
- [Fluorosis Facts: Information for Parents & Caregivers](#)
- [FAQs Fluoride and Children](#)

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