

Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation Policy: Sugary Drinks

Early childhood **tooth decay is a complex disease** influenced by many factors, including social determinants of health. We're fighting a pervasive disease **affecting 40% of kindergartners and 55% of third-graders in Colorado**, according to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.¹ **Preventing this disease goes beyond brushing two times for two minutes a day.** This is why we take a comprehensive approach to the prevention of early childhood tooth decay through our programs and grants.

Where we stand on sugary drinks

Dental caries (tooth decay) in children is a diet-mediated disease. Sugar is a root cause of erosion of teeth.² **Sugary drinks (see list in sidebar) are especially a problem when consumed/sipped throughout the day.** Our research, conducted among low-income families with young children, has revealed knowledge gaps regarding the role of sugar in tooth decay. We also learned to share the importance of drinking fluoridated water in improving oral health. Furthermore, we learned that parents/caregivers were more likely to believe juice is "healthy." Knowing that juice and juice drinks are a common source of sugar in children's diets, Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation (DDCOF) advises that:

- **Limit children's consumption of juice to mealtimes and only serve juice in open cups.** Juice and other **sugary drinks should never be served in sippy cups** because sippy cups encourage all-day sipping.
- **Serve only water between meals and at bedtime.** When fluoridated, water helps re-mineralize teeth and prevent decay. Children should **never go to bed with any drink except water.**
- **Brush children's teeth with fluoride toothpaste** after the last meal or snack and drink of the day (unless the drink is plain water).

Because not all families have access to fresh fruits and vegetables, DDCOF supports the consumption of 100% fruit juice as long as it is limited to the American Academy of Pediatrics' recommended 4-6 ounces per day for children ages 1-6, and limited to mealtimes. Children under six months of age should not be given juice.³ When possible, children should be given whole fruits and vegetables instead of juice.

DDCOF's Public Will Building program focuses on limiting children's exposure to sugary drinks, especially fruit juices and juice drinks. In addition, the program works to:

- Increase children's access to fluoridated water, especially in schools, child cares centers and community centers.
- Expand access to fresh fruits and vegetables among low-income populations.

Factors impacting oral health include:

- Socio-economic status
- Health literacy
- Lack of fluoride exposure
- Lack of access to oral health care
- Unhealthy environments
- Policies that fail to foster healthy lifestyles

Sugary drinks include:

- Fruit juices
- Juice drinks
- Flavored milks
- Sodas
- Flavored waters
- Sports drinks
- Other beverages with added and natural sugars

¹ https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/PW_OH_Chew-On-This.pdf

² <http://jdr.sagepub.com/content/early/2015/07/30/0022034515590377.abstract>

³ <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/107/5/1210>