

What to Do When Your Child Has a Dental Emergency

Remember accidents do happen, and knowing what to do and when to do it can mean the difference between saving and losing a tooth.

There are a number of simple precautions that you can take to avoid accidents and injuries to your child's teeth:

One way to reduce the chances of damage to his/her teeth, lips, cheeks, and tongue is to have your child wear a mouthguard when participating in sports or recreational activities. Have your child avoid chewing ice, popcorn kernels, and hard candy which can crack a tooth.

Knocked Out (Avulsed) Permanent Tooth:

Find the tooth. Handle the tooth by the crown, not the root portion. You may rinse the tooth with milk, but **DO NOT** clean or scrub the tooth unnecessarily. Without touching the root, try to reinsert it into the socket. If you cannot reinsert the tooth, transport the tooth in a cup containing cold milk. Your child must see a dentist **IMMEDIATELY!!** Time is a critical factor in saving the tooth. Remember to take the tooth with you.

After placing your child's permanent tooth back into his/her mouth and stabilizing it, the tooth will still require follow-up evaluations for 2-3 years to determine the outcome of treatment.

Potential complications following an avulsion include changes near the root of the tooth, submergence of the tooth, or infection. Please ask your pediatric dentist any questions you may have concerning all the risks, benefits, and alternatives of treatment.

A knocked out baby tooth should not be reinserted (replanted). You should take your child to his/her pediatrician within 48 hours for a tetanus consultation. Your child can rinse with a chlorhexidine rinse and take Tylenol or Ibuprofen, if needed.

Toothache:

Clean the area around the affected tooth thoroughly. Rinse your child's mouth vigorously with warm water or use dental floss to dislodge impacted food or debris.

Do not place aspirin on your child's gum or on the aching tooth. If his/her face is swollen, apply a cold compress. Give your child Tylenol (acetaminophen) or Motrin (ibuprofen) for pain, and see a pediatric dentist as soon as possible.

Cut or bitten tongue, lip, or cheek:

Apply ice to the bruised areas. If there is bleeding, apply firm but gentle pressure with a gauze or cloth. If bleeding does not stop after 15 minutes or it cannot be controlled by firm pressure, take your child to the hospital emergency room.

Loose or cracked teeth:

Rinse dirt from the injured area with warm water and then check for broken teeth fragments. If all the teeth are intact, gently touch the traumatized teeth to check for looseness. If one is very loose or cracked, call your pediatric dentist immediately. Place cold compresses over the area of the injury on your child's face. Keep your child on a soft diet of soups, yogurt, or liquids to prevent further damage.

Broken braces and wires:

If a broken appliance can be removed easily, go ahead and take it out. If the appliance cannot be removed, cover the sharp or protruding portion with cotton balls, gauze, chewing gum, or the wax provided by your orthodontist. If a wire is stuck in the gums, cheek, or tongue, do not remove it. Take your child back to his/her orthodontic office immediately. Loose or broken appliances which do not bother your child don't usually require emergency attention.

Other Emergency Conditions:

Possible broken jaw:

If you suspect that your child has fractured his/her jaw, try to keep the jaw from moving by using a towel, necktie, or handkerchief to immobilize the jaw. Take your child immediately to the nearest hospital emergency room. Apply cold compresses to control swelling.

Bleeding after baby tooth falls out:

If a baby tooth comes out and there is some bleeding, fold and pack a clean gauze or cloth over the bleeding area. Have your child bite on the gauze with pressure for 15 minutes. This may be repeated, but if severe bleeding persists, see your pediatric dentist.

Permanent tooth pushed out of place:

If your child's tooth is moved inward or outward, reposition it with very light finger pressure back to its normal position. Do not force the tooth back into position. Hold the tooth in place with a tissue or gauze and contact your pediatric dentist.

Swelling:

If any part of your child's mouth, jaw, lips, or face starts to swell, you should seek help as soon as possible. Swelling can be caused by a very severe infection.

Swelling that is caused by infection that occurs around the eye, in the throat area that causes difficulty swallowing, or is associated with a fever can be life threatening.

Go see your pediatrician or emergency room immediately!