

Everything you need to know about pediatric dentistry



WHAT IS PEDIATRIC DENTISTRY?

Pediatric dentistry is the specialty concerned with providing oral healthcare to infants, children, adolescents and special needs patients. Pediatric dentistry is one of 12 recognized dental specialties in Canada. There are fewer than 250 practicing pediatric dentists in Canada, and 4,800 active pediatric dentists in the United States.

WHAT DOES A PEDIATRIC DENTIST DO?

Pediatric dentists are the pediatricians of dentistry. The pediatric dentist lays the foundation for good oral health in early childhood. Some of the many services pediatric dentists are trained to offer include: anticipatory guidance for parents, caries risk assessments, preventive dentistry, nutritional counseling, and restorative dentistry. Should treatment be necessary for infants, children and adolescents, they can receive dental care awake, mildly sedated or asleep. Sometimes just a little TLC and gentle guidance goes a long way!

WHY SEE A PEDIATRIC DENTIST?

Children should be seen by the age of one, since early preventive care and regular checkups can avert future problems resulting from tooth decay, abnormal development, gum disease and oral health conditions resulting from a general health problem. Research has shown that children who do not have a preventive visit by age three are more likely to need emergency and restorative care.

Some dental problems begin early, such as baby-bottle tooth decay, a condition caused by long, frequent exposure to milk, formula and fruit juice, coupled with lack of oral hygiene. An early start helps prevent these problems and increases the chance for effective treatment if they do occur.

Dental caries, also known as Early Childhood Caries (ECC), remains the most prevalent chronic childhood disease in North America. It is five times more common than asthma. ECC is a preventable disease that increases in severity if left untreated, causes pain, and has a strong, lasting effect on a child's overall general health.

Baby teeth serve a definite purpose to aid in mastication, thereby improving feeding habits and allowing a child to thrive. If baby teeth are lost prematurely or damaged, this can cause problems with the adult teeth. A child's general health will be affected if diseased baby teeth are left untreated. As such, the Canadian Dental Association and Canadian Pediatric Society recommend children have a "dental home" by age one to reduce these risks.

Starting early helps promote healthy teeth!

WHAT SPECIAL TRAINING DO PEDIATRIC DENTISTS HAVE?

Pediatric dentists must complete two to three years of advanced training (beyond the general dentist degree of four years of dental school) to prepare them to treat a wide variety of children's oral health problems. Pediatric dentists are qualified

and licensed to treat children exclusively, and they are also trained and qualified to care for patients with medical, physical and/or mental disabilities. A pediatric dentist's office and equipment are typically designed for children to ensure a safe and non-intimidating environment, and staff members are trained to work with children to provide a positive and fun experience.

Specific areas of training include:

- Child psychology and anticipation of each child's needs, so they can be guided appropriately at their level of understanding
- Anxiety and pain management (with and without medication)
- Effective use of behaviour guidance and sedation techniques
- Addressing overall growth and development, with special focus on facial, jaw and tooth development, childhood illnesses and diseases
- Treatment of traumatic injuries, such as injured teeth that may have fractured, been displaced or knocked out
- Diagnosis of oral abnormalities that may be connected to other systemic health problems

PEDIATRIC DENTISTS HAVE EXPERIENCE WITH THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS IN CHILDREN:

- ADD/ADHD
- Anxiety/Depression
- Asthma And Allergies
- Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Cerebral Palsy



- Cleft Lip / Cleft Palate
- Congenital Cardiac Disorders
- Diabetes
- Down Syndrome
- Eating Disorders
- Epilepsy
- Hearing Impairments
- HIV
- Traumatic Brain Injury

WHO IS A LEADING AUTHORITY FOR PEDIATRIC DENTISTS?

The Canadian Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (CAPD) is the recognized authority on pediatric oral healthcare and the leader in several prominent areas, including: Development of oral health policies and clinical guidelines; Advocacy for children's oral healthcare; Dissemination of information to parents, guardians and other caregivers about children's oral healthcare; and Continuing professional education for dentists who treat children.

The CAPD is closely aligned with the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD). The vision of the CAPD/AAPD is optimal health and care for infants, children, adolescents and persons with special healthcare needs. The pediatric dentist is a recognized primary oral healthcare provider and resource for specialty referral.

WHAT ARE THE SKILLS REQUIRED TO ASSIST IN A PEDIATRIC DENTAL OFFICE?

Must love kids!!! In addition to CDA Level II skills, excellent chairside and oral communication skills are necessary. Having pediatric experience is a great asset. Being proactive, creative and having an ability to anticipate a child's next move is as important as anticipating the dentist's next move! Team members must enjoy working with children and effectively communicating with both children and parents. As such, being patient, gentle and reassuring to both children and parents helps relieve any anxieties they may harbour about oral health. ☺

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