



Background

Healthy teeth and gums are necessary for general good health. They play an important part in the digestion of food, correct speech and self-confidence by enhancing our appearance. Keeping healthy primary (baby) teeth until they fall out naturally is crucial in maintaining the space for permanent (adult) teeth.

Given the number of children who attend childcare and the length of time they spend in care, childcare plays a significant role in the prevention of teeth and gum diseases in young children, and in the development of healthy teeth and gums. Further, childcare provides the ideal opportunity to instil in children long-term oral health habits.

Policy statement

Little Learners Day Care Centre ('The Service') promotes good dental habits, and is also committed to minimising any risk to children's dental health from food and drink consumed at the Service. The Service follows recommendations from the recognised dental health authorities, and provides this information to families.

Strategies and practices

- The oral health message is promoted amongst families through verbal communication, pamphlets and dental health educational materials.
- Children are given water when thirsty, and unflavoured milk if meals have been refused.
- Children are encouraged to drink water at meal times to help remove any food left in between their teeth from lunch. Children are offered apples after lunch to promote dental hygiene.
- Educators use opportunities that arise during children's play and at meal and snack times to talk to the children about dental health issues. The Service resources include plastic 'healthy food'. When appropriate to children's interest and the program, educators intentionally teach children about looking after their teeth through activities.
- To ensure that children receive early positive experiences, the Service arranges for dentists and appropriate allied dental health professionals to visit the Service to talk to the children about dental hygiene. We engage with an external dentist to attend the Service and perform dental checks for children of families who wish to use this service.

Additional safe practices for babies (0-2yrs)

- Mothers are encouraged and supported to breastfeed.
- Only milk or water is used in baby bottles.
- The use of pacifiers (dummies) is discouraged, and parents' attention drawn to the tooth decay risks associated with their use. If parents still request a pacifier be used, educators try to minimise its use. Pacifiers are stored in clear labeled containers when not required. Honey, sweetener or any other substances are not used on pacifiers.
- Fluids may be introduced in a sippy cup from 6 months of age.
- Parents are encouraged to introduce solids from 6 months of age, as solids satisfy the child's hunger requiring fewer bottle feeds. Bottles are discouraged after 12 months.
- Educators will supervise all children with milk or formula in their bottles during feeding time. Educators remove a child's bottle as soon as feeding is completed.

Responsibilities of parents

- Ensure all breast milk or formula brought into the service is labelled with your child's name.

Links to other policies

- Food Preparation, Storage and Handling Policy
- Nutrition, Food and Beverage Policy

Sources

- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011.
- Guide to the National Quality Standard 2018.

Further reading and useful websites

- Centre for Community Child Health – <http://www.rch.org.au/ccch/>
- The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne - Dental Care

Policy review

The Service encourages staff and parents to be actively involved in the annual review of each of its policies and procedures. In addition, the Service will accommodate any new legislative changes as they occur, and any issues identified as part the Service's commitment to quality improvement. The Service consults with relevant recognised authorities as part of the annual review to ensure the policy contents are consistent with current research and contemporary views on best practice.