

Oral Health Tips

Keep Your Smile Safe This Summer

School's out and summer's here. What are your kids doing for fun this summer? Whether it's soccer or horseback riding camp, family vacation or just playing at the neighborhood park — your children's teeth may be at risk of injury. Summer smile safety is not just about preventing sports injuries — injuries to the teeth also can occur during daily activities. Traumatic tooth injuries range from minor chips and cracks to teeth knocked out of the socket. By taking a few precautions and establishing good safety habits, you may help preserve your children's smile this summer.

Mouthguards

Mouthguards can be an important piece of protective gear and an easy way to protect an athlete's smile from serious injury. A mouthguard is made out of flexible plastic that is worn during athletic and recreational activities to protect teeth from trauma. Many of our children will be playing sports through school, city teams or going to sports camps. This includes not just organized sports, but also activities with friends. Mouthguards are an important and simple measure that can aid in the prevention of dental trauma.

- It is a good idea to get your children used to wearing mouthguards at a young age so they can get in the habit of protecting their teeth for a lifetime.
- Mouthguards are effective in moving soft tissue in the oral cavity away from the teeth, preventing laceration and bruising of the lips and cheeks, especially for those who wear orthodontic appliances.
- Mouthguards should be worn while engaging in any activity that places teeth at risk of injury. Accidents happen not only during official games but also during informal play. Parents should remind children that it is equally important to wear their protective gear during practice and warm ups.

American Dental Association recommends that parents consider having their children of any age wear a mouthguard for any of the following sports:

Acrobatics	Racquetball
Basketball	Rugby
Bicycling	Shot Putting
Boxing	Skateboarding
Equestrian Events	Skiing
Extreme Sports	Skydiving
Field Events	Soccer
Field Hockey	Softball
Football	Squash
Gymnastics	Surfing
Handball	Volleyball
Ice Hockey	Water Polo
Inline skating	Weightlifting
La Crosse	Wrestling
Martial Arts	

Helmets

Many summer activities involve wheels including biking, skateboarding and rollerblading. Check the list below for a few precautions before setting out on wheels.

- Be sure your children have a helmet.

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- Helmets should fit snugly and the strap always should be worn.
- Parents should set a good example by wearing a helmet on all bike trips.
- Start to wear helmets early with the first tricycle.

Car Seats and Seat Belts

Summer means family vacations, which often require time in the car. Dental injuries can be prevented by taking a few precautions.

- Set a good example for your children by always wearing a seat belt, and insist that they buckle up.
- Make sure that the seat belts and car seats are in proper working condition and properly installed.
- Infants and toddlers should remain in a rear-facing car seat until age 2.
- Toddlers and preschoolers should use a forward-facing car seat with a harness for as long as possible.
- School-aged children should use a booster seat until they are at least 8 years old.
- Do not let your child get out of his or her seat while the car is moving.

Playground or Backyard Safety

Summer weather and family picnics mean lots of playground and backyard play structures. Taking precautions may mean fewer injuries.

- Make sure the equipment fits the child. If you need to help the child on to the equipment, they are not yet ready for it.
- Check the equipment for any sharp or protruding objects.

Summer should be a fun time of the year for children and youth, and with summer activities there are more chances for injuries to teeth. Parents can take precautions to protect their children by providing adequate supervision and safety devices like helmets and mouthguards. Protect yourself. Protect your children. Play hard and play safe. Have a great summer.

Sources: American Dental Association: www.ada.org; Academy of General Dentistry: www.agd.org; Sports Dentistry: www.sportsdentistry.com; National Safe Kids: www.safekids.org; American Academy of Pediatrics: www.aap.org