

Oral Health in Primary Care

The goal is to reduce the incidence of early childhood tooth decay by:

- Increasing oral risk assessments by primary care clinicians (PCCs)
- Increasing rates of dental varnishing
- Linking children to a dental home (recommended by age 1 & throughout childhood and adolescence)

Key Points

- **What is Dental Varnishing?** Dental varnishing is a topical fluoride application that is applied to erupted teeth in the primary care setting. The visit also includes oral evaluation and parent/caregiver education. Physicians and nurses may apply the varnish.
- **Why should PCCs Varnish? Access:** The AAP recommends “every child should have a dental home established by 1 year of age.” The reality is that 89% of children in this age group see a physician at least once yearly while only 1.5% sees a dentist. This points to the importance of a **risk assessment screen** in primary care.
- **Frequency?** Fluoride varnish can be applied to infants and toddlers teeth up to **6 times by age 3 ½ or through age 41 months**. Application can take place during well or sick visits and at an optimal frequency of every 3-4 months (minimum of 60-day interval between procedures).
- **Evidence?** Research shows that children having 4 or more varnishings before their 3rd birthday have the most benefit by reducing cavities and the need for dental fillings.

Screening & Referrals

Evidence of screening and appropriate dental referral are components of the Into the Mouths of Babes program. The following are approved screening tools:

- NC Priority Oral Risk Assessment and Referral Tool (PORRT)
- Bright Futures Oral Health Risk Assessment Tool

Billing, Coding & Payment

Dental Varnish Visit:

- **D0145:** Oral Evaluation & Counseling to Caregiver
- **D1206:** Application of Dental Varnish

Metrics

- Annual Dental Visits (proxy for dental home)
- Varnishing: 4 or more by 42 months of age

The goal is to reduce the incidence of early childhood tooth decay in North Carolina by assessing for oral risk in primary care, applying varnish, and linking children to a dental home.