

FEBRUARY IS NATIONAL CHILDREN'S DENTAL HEALTH MONTH

Are you prepared for a dental emergency?

Thousands of dental emergencies—from injuries to a painful, abscessed tooth—take place every day. Would you know what to do if your child broke a tooth or had a tooth knocked out while playing outdoors? What if you had a bad toothache in the middle of the night and couldn't get to the dentist until the next day? Knowing what to do can lessen the pain and save a tooth that might otherwise be lost. Keep your dental office phone number and an emergency number where the dentist can be reached after hours with other emergency numbers, such as your family doctor, and fire and police departments. Some families post these numbers on the refrigerator or inside a kitchen cabinet door near the phone. Call the dentist immediately for instructions on how to handle a dental emergency.

Toothache: Rinse the mouth with warm water to clean it out. Gently use dental floss or an interdental cleaner to remove any food or other debris that may be caught between the teeth. Never put aspirin or any other painkiller against the gums near the aching tooth. This could burn gum tissue. If the toothache persists, try to see the dentist. Don't rely on painkillers. They may temporarily relieve pain but your dentist should evaluate the condition.

Knocked-out (avulsed) tooth: Try to find the tooth! This may not be as easy as you think if the injury took place on a playground, basketball court or while skateboarding, so try to stay calm. Hold the tooth by the crown and rinse the root in water if the tooth is dirty. Don't scrub it or remove any attached tissue fragments. If it's possible, gently insert and hold the tooth in its socket while you head to the dentist. If that's not possible, put the tooth in a cup of milk and bring it to the dentist. Time is critical for successful re-implantation, so try to get to your dentist immediately.

Broken tooth: Rinse your mouth with warm water to clean the area. Use cold compresses on the outside of the cheek to help reduce the swelling.

Tongue or lip bites or wounds: Clean the area gently with a clean cloth and apply cold compresses to reduce any swelling. If the bleeding can't be controlled, go to a hospital emergency room or clinic. You may be able to reduce bleeding from the tongue by pulling it forward and using gauze to put pressure on the wound.

Objects caught between teeth: Try to gently remove the object with dental floss. Never use a sharp instrument to remove any object that is stuck between your teeth. If you can't dislodge the object with floss, contact your dentist.

Possible broken jaw: Apply cold compresses to control swelling. Get to the hospital emergency room immediately.

(ada.org 2013)