

What Every Hudson Valley Parent Should Know This National Dental Care Month

By Dr. Anthony Skrobola and Dr. Benjamin Dancygier, *Valley Pediatric Dentistry & Orthodontics*



May is National Dental Care Month, and as a pediatric dental and orthodontic practice here in the Hudson Valley, we get asked the same question repeatedly: “*When should my child first see the dentist?*” Most parents are surprised by the answer.

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends a child’s first dental visit by age 1—or within six months of the first tooth coming in. That might sound early, but it’s not really about cavities at that stage. It’s about guidance, development, and prevention.

FIRST VISIT EXPECTATIONS

At that first visit, we’re looking at things parents don’t always expect—how your child feeds and swallows, oral habits like thumb sucking or pacifier use, and how the jaws and airway are beginning to develop. We’re also checking for early signs of decay, which can happen faster than most people realize.

Dentistry—especially pediatric dentistry—has changed a lot over the years. Today, we’re not just focused on straight teeth or cavities. We’re paying much closer attention to how the mouth develops as part of the entire body system. Mouth breathing, snoring, difficulty chewing or swallowing, and even certain speech concerns can often be tied back to oral and facial development. In some children, this might involve something like a tongue-tie, which can affect feeding early on and later influence speech and growth.

Many parents assume orthodontics starts in the teenage years, but early evaluation matters. The American Association of Orthodontists recommends an orthodontic screening by age 7. That doesn’t mean braces at 7. It means we can identify developing issues early, guide jaw growth, and in some cases avoid more complex treatment later. Sometimes the most important thing we do is simply monitor growth and step in at the right time.



THE IMPORTANCE OF PREVENTION

One of the biggest shifts we’ve seen in our practice over the years is how much can be prevented with the right approach early on. Simple habits—like consistent brushing, being mindful of diet (especially hidden sugars), and monitoring development—can make a significant difference. When we catch things early, treatment is often less invasive, less expensive, and much easier for both kids and parents.

A child’s early experiences at the dentist shape how they feel about dental care for life. Our goal is always to make visits comfortable, low-stress, and even fun. When kids feel at ease, everything becomes easier—from routine cleanings to orthodontic care.

EARLY GUIDANCE

If there’s one takeaway this month, it’s this: don’t wait for a problem to show up before getting your child evaluated. Whether your child is an infant with feeding challenges, a toddler just getting their first teeth, or a school-aged child with crowding or habits, early guidance can make a huge difference.

We are a Hudson Valley-based pediatric dental and orthodontic practice focused on comprehensive, child-centered care—from infancy through adolescence. Our approach emphasizes not just healthy teeth, but proper growth, function, and long-term wellness. ♦