

# NEW GUIDELINES

One of the greatest gifts a parent can give a child is a lifetime of good oral health care, and today first visits to the dentist coincide with first birthdays.

## for Children's Teeth

Jamie Zinober admits that she wasn't sure at what age she should take her infant twin boys to the dentist, so when she learned about an informal class that was being held at the childhood resource center called Baby Bungalow, she attended.

The class was presented by Lesley Rudolph, DMD, a diplomate of the American Board of Pediatric Dentistry. Dr. Rudolph, whose patients fondly refer to her as *Dr. Lesley*, has her own practice, South Tampa Pediatric Dentistry, in Tampa.

"She taught us that a parent should begin taking their children to the dentist as soon as their teeth begin coming in," remembers Jamie.

"Until recently, the conventional wisdom was to wait until children were three years old before taking them in for their first dental appointment," educates Dr. Rudolph. "However, current studies reveal that by the time children are three, many already have cavities that require treatment. That means that we have missed not only a big opportunity to educate the parents on prevention during those early years, but also a chance to make the child's first experience at the dentist's office a totally positive, happy time."

Jamie says she took her twin boys to see Dr. Rudolph right after their first birthdays: "We let each of them sit in the dental chair and get acquainted with all the different pieces of equipment."

The equipment in Dr. Rudolph's office, which is all state-of-the-art, includes monitors in each of the rooms so children can choose DVDs to watch while they are being treated.

"We begin every initial visit with what we call *Tell, Show, Do*, so the kids know exactly what to expect," describes Dr. Rudolph. "During that session, we bring the children into the treatment room, tell them about everything we have, show it to them, explain how we're going to use it, and refer to it by a special child-friendly term. For instance, we call the suction *Mr. Thirsty* and we refer to the water spray as a *squirt gun*. We let them play with everything first in a very non-threatening manner."

"The staff is amazing," notes Jamie fondly. "Because I had two little ones, some of the staff members played with one child and stickered him from head to toe while I had the other one in the office with *Dr. Lesley*. They really helped me out."

Some of the qualities Dr. Rudolph looks for in her staff are child-friendly demeanor, professionalism, and enthusiasm.

"They are so gentle and understanding," marvels Jamie. "Taking your children to the dentist can make a parent anxious. But when I go there, I know they understand."

"One of the office protocols I use that makes my practice different from many other pediatric dental practices is that we have the parents stay with the child throughout the entire visit because they play a very active role in the health of their children's mouths," explains Dr. Rudolph. "I'm only seeing the child twice a year, whereas the parents are with them three hundred sixty-five days a year, so the more we get the parents involved, the better we

Jamie says that taking her twin sons to their pediatric dentist could be challenging, but Dr. Rudolph and her staff make it a relaxing, informative, positive experience.



PHOTO BY AMANDA SMITH

### SOUTH TAMPA PEDIATRIC DENTISTRY

LESLEY RUDOLPH, DMD

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can educate them.

"For instance, I have had parents confide to me that they are happy to brush their children's teeth, but the children won't let them. During their child's visit, we can show them exactly what we do, how we position them, and ideas on how to motivate them during brushing, which makes it easier for the parent to care for their children's oral health at home."

#### Baby teeth

Following the first pediatric visit, Dr. Rudolph suggests six-month checkups: "It gives us a good opportunity to discuss prevention and to monitor the eruption of the teeth as they come in. Because there is a typical sequence to eruption, regular dental visits give us a chance to diagnose any variance from this sequence and to treat potential problems early. It also enables us to monitor our patient's bite, and to get an early idea of where things are going.

"I make it a point to impress upon parents during that first visit, too, that as soon as their child's teeth come in, they need to be brushed, using a tiny bit of toothpaste containing fluoride. This provides significant prevention benefits."

Dr. Rudolph also counsels parents to avoid nighttime bottles containing any type of sugar because it can lead to tooth decay.

Flossing is also an important factor for children's oral health.

"As soon as the teeth are touching and the toothbrush cannot fit in between the teeth, parents need to begin flossing their children's teeth," informs Dr. Rudolph. "This is another area where we can help parents by teaching them proper flossing techniques."

She says an additional popular topic at young dental visits involves pacifiers and thumb habits.

"One of the stages of development for children is the oral phase, so it is very normal for children to want to put everything in their mouths. They explore their world by doing that, and it can provide comfort for them. However, usually around three years old we want to start thinking about how the habit is affecting the teeth and what kind of strategies we're going to use to stop it."

The last baby teeth to come in are typically the two-year molars, which on average erupt between 24 and 36 months.

#### Permanent teeth

Permanent teeth usually begin to come in at about six years of age.

"This is the stage at which children are able to become a little more independent with their brushing," observes Dr. Rudolph, "but their fine motor skills are not usually quite developed enough for them to floss effectively, so we need parents' help with that.

"And we still involve the parents throughout the entire visit. It's a nice

transition, a time when we can educate both the parent *and* the child on healthy oral habits.

"Then, at about thirteen years old, when all the baby teeth are gone and the permanent teeth are in, the young teen is independent enough to take care of his or her own teeth."

"My twins are two-and-a-half years old now," says Jamie. "I think at this phase in their lives, our appointments are more about educating moms and dads and getting the children used to the notion of going to the dentist.

"It's amazing to have them treated with so much patience and kindness." *FHCN—Kris Kline*

#### For the sake of your little ones

Dr. Rudolph looks forward to meeting you and your child. For more information, or to schedule an appointment, please phone (813) 874-0111 for her office located at 3702 W. Swann Ave. in Tampa.

#### Lesley Rudolph, DMD



- Diplomate, American Board of Pediatric Dentistry
- BA, Duke University: 2000 - summa cum laude
- DMD, University of Florida: 2006 - magna cum laude
- Certificate in Pediatric Dentistry, University of Florida: 2008
- Former elementary school teacher (Independent Day School, Carrollwood)

#### Awards and Honors:

- James R. Roche Award of Excellence for achieving the highest score in the nation on the written section of the 2008 American Board of Pediatric Dentistry Examination
- Richard C. Pugh Achievement Award for scoring in the top 3% on the American Board of Pediatric Dentistry Qualifying Exam
- Alpha Omega Award for achieving #1 rank in the dental school class
- Omicron Kappa Upsilon Dental Honor Society
- A. Lewis Leo Outstanding Student Award in recognition of leadership achievements, outstanding professionalism and ethical behavior as a student at the University of Florida College of Dentistry
- Dr. Carroll G. Bennett Award for Academic Excellence in Pediatric Dentistry
- American Academy of Oral Maxillofacial Pathology Dental Student Award for exemplary aptitude and achievement in oral and maxillofacial pathology

#### Professional Memberships

- American Dental Association
- American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry
- Member of the Craniofacial Team at St. Joseph's Hospital