

## **Background on Tooth Decay and Prevention Strategies**

Dental caries (tooth decay) is an infectious and transmissible disease that affects disproportionately racial and ethnic minorities in California. However, this condition is preventable.

The ***Stop the Spread of Tooth Decay*** educational materials were developed in collaboration between the Maternal and Child Health Branch and the California Nutrition Network for Healthy, Active Families. These materials are intended to be used as part of a comprehensive dental public health strategy to prevent tooth decay among mothers and their children.

### **Key Messages:**

- Dental caries is an infectious and transmissible disease
- Mothers are key in stopping the transmission of caries to their children
- Use of xylitol chewing gum daily, after every meal, can help prevent tooth decay in adults and children over four years of age.
- Avoid the frequency of eating sticky foods
- Continue to seek professional assistance from a dental health professional
- Use of appropriate sources of fluoride is key in the prevention of tooth decay.
  - Systemic sources of fluoride (normally ingested). However, these also have a topical effect.
    - Fluoridated water
    - Dietary fluoride supplements (chewable tablets, lozenges or liquids)
  - Topical sources (normally not ingested)
    - Toothpaste
    - Mouth rinse
    - Fluoride varnish. It is a brown viscous resin base that sets on contact with moisture in the mouth when applied to the teeth of infants and toddlers.
    - Professionally applied fluoride in a dental office or community program

**Note:** One should only have one source of systemic fluoride intake. However, one can have various sources of topical fluoride intake in addition to one source of systemic intake. Please check with your water district about the existence of optimum levels of fluoride in your water (between 0.7 to 1.2 ppm of fluoride in the water).