

BRUSHING IS FUN!

Guidelines for Toothbrushing in North Carolina Child Care Programs: Preschool Classrooms (3- to 6-year-old children)



Steps for Group Toothbrushing in Preschool Classrooms

Prepare to Brush

1. If brushing does not follow a meal or snack, clean and sanitize tables and have children wash their hands.
2. Adult washes hands and wears powder- and latex-free disposable gloves to prepare and distribute supplies.
3. Using a single tube of fluoride toothpaste, place a small, pea-size amount on the rim of a small disposable cup for each child. Cups can be prepared before toothbrushes are distributed to minimize children's waiting time.
4. Using a separate paper towel/napkin for each child, adult retrieves a toothbrush from the rack and gives the brush and paper towel/napkin to the appropriate child. Repeat this process for each child, using a new paper towel/napkin for each child's toothbrush. Use the paper towel/napkin as a barrier, being careful not to touch the toothbrush with gloves.
 - Call one child at a time to come and get their brush, paper towel, and cup with toothpaste OR distribute the supplies to the children while they are seated at the tables.
 - If children are finishing a meal or snack, do this one table at a time. Have children from one table throw trash away, pick up a cup with toothpaste on the rim, get their toothbrush and paper towel/napkin from the adult, then return to their seat at the table.
 - If brushing follows a meal or snack, children do not need to wash hands if they washed prior to eating. Tables do not need to be sanitized between eating and group brushing.



Group Brushing

5. When all children are seated with their supplies, an adult instructs the children to use their toothbrush bristles to scoop up the small pea-size amount of fluoride toothpaste from the rim of the disposable cup.
 - The American Dental Association recommends brushing for 2 minutes. Use a timer.



- 6.** The adult instructs the children to brush gently back and forth, up and down, inside, outside, and top of all teeth.
 - If the adult models by brushing her/his own teeth, or assists a child, the adult must remove gloves, wash hands, and re-glove.
- 7.** At the end of two minutes, adult instructs children to spit into their cups and wipe their mouths with the paper towel or napkin. Children stuff the paper towel or napkin into the cup.
 - Rinsing the mouth with water is not recommended or necessary. The small amount of fluoride toothpaste left in the mouth after spitting helps strengthen the teeth and prevents cavities, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.*

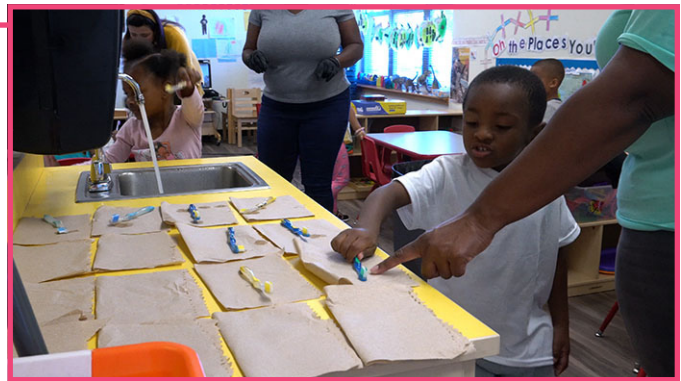
During toothbrushing:

Playing music or singing to the children makes brushing fun!

Children may spit into their cups to avoid drooling onto the table or themselves.

Clean Up

- 8.** Adult cleans and disinfects sink.
- 9.** Adult lays out one paper towel/napkin for each child's brush.
- 10.** One table at a time, the children get up to throw away their cups and rinse brushes.
- 11.** Each child rinses his/her brush under running water one at a time, then places it on a separate paper towel/napkin laid out on a hard surface (counter or table) to dry. Each toothbrush must be placed on its own separate disposable napkin/paper towel to prevent spreading germs.
- 12.** Children return to the table while adult cleans and disinfects sink.
- 13.** Each child washes his/her hands at cleaned and disinfected sink.
- 14.** Adult washes hands.
- 15.** When the brush handles are dry, an adult wearing gloves picks up each child's rinsed brush using the dried paper towel it is placed on and returns each brush one-at-a-time to the storage rack slot with the child's name or number on it.
- 16.** Adult cleans and sanitizes tables and surfaces where brushes dried, removes gloves and washes hands.



Toothbrush and Storage Rack Care

Toothbrushes

1. Adult places each toothbrush upright in a commercial storage rack, not touching other brushes.
2. Use children's names or assigned numbers to identify brushes, with labels placed on the rack and on each brush.
3. Allow brushes to air dry. Individual covers are not recommended.
4. Store toothbrushes in a protected area, such as a cabinet.
5. Do not store in the bathroom, toileting, or diapering areas.
6. Clean, sanitize, and air-dry storage racks weekly, or sooner if visibly soiled.

Sanitizing Toothbrush Racks

1. Clean, sanitize, and air-dry toothbrush rack in child care center kitchen sink.
2. Wash hands and wear gloves.
3. Using a separate paper towel for each brush, remove toothbrushes from the rack and place each brush on top of the paper towel. Make sure the toothbrushes do not touch each other.
4. Clean, sanitize, and air-dry the rack.
5. When the rack is dry, pick up each toothbrush, one at a time, with the paper towel used to remove it from the rack, and place it back in the rack. Make sure to match the child's name/number on the brush to the slot on the rack.
6. Remove gloves and wash hands.
 - When removing and replacing toothbrushes in the rack, wearing gloves and using a separate paper towel/napkin for handling each brush prevents spreading germs from one brush to another and to the adult handling the brushes.

Helpful Hints for Group Toothbrushing

- ✓ Keep group toothbrushing activity calm and positive by singing or playing toothbrushing songs softly as the class prepares.
- ✓ Group brushing right after a meal or snack avoids an extra transition.
- ✓ Use child-friendly words to describe areas of the mouth during brushing such as 'chewing teeth' for back teeth and 'cutting teeth' for front teeth. Using 'upstairs' for top teeth and 'downstairs' for bottom teeth add an element of fun.
- ✓ Praising children with statements such as 'You're doing a great job brushing all of your teeth!' and 'Fluoride toothpaste makes our teeth strong!' lets them know you support their efforts.
- ✓ If more than one adult is present, have each supervise a smaller group of children.
- ✓ Use a toothbrushing chart where each child can place a sticker after brushing. The chart also serves as a class toothbrushing monitoring system.
- ✓ Making toothbrushing fun will create a positive experience for children and you.

General Toothbrushing Information

- ✓ Toothbrushing begins when an infant's first tooth starts to appear through the gums.
- ✓ Up to a child's 3rd birthday, an adult brushes each individual child's teeth. After the 3rd birthday, children participate in group brushing in the classroom. Adults assist with this activity by supervising, encouraging, and timing toothbrushing.
- ✓ Establish a daily routine, brushing once during the child care day when it works best for the classroom schedule.
- ✓ If group brushing occurs immediately after a meal or snack, sanitizing tables and children's handwashing is postponed until after toothbrushing.
- ✓ In a child care setting, children do not need to brush at the sink. Sinks are used for handwashing and for rinsing toothbrushes *after* brushing.
- ✓ Rinsing the mouth with water after brushing is not recommended or necessary.
- ✓ Centers located in a school that use the cafeteria as their approved kitchen must send the toothbrush rack to the cafeteria to be cleaned, sanitized, and air dried.

About Fluoride Toothpaste

- ✓ The most important part of toothbrushing is for the fluoride toothpaste to reach all the child's teeth. This is the best way to prevent cavities!
- ✓ Use children's fluoride toothpaste with the American Dental Association Seal of Acceptance.
- ✓ Use the proper amount of fluoride toothpaste, depending on the age of the child:
 - A smear the size of a grain of rice for children, from tooth eruption to 3 years.
 - A pea-sized amount for children ages 3 to 6 years.
- ✓ Dispense fluoride toothpaste on an intermediate surface.
- ✓ Store fluoride toothpaste out of the reach of children.

About Toothbrushes

- ✓ Use child-size toothbrushes with soft bristles.
- ✓ Label each toothbrush with child's name or assigned number.
- ✓ Label each toothbrush rack slot with each child's name or assigned number for toothbrush storage.
- ✓ Toothbrushes are stored with bristles upright to air dry, and not touching other brushes. Individual covers are not recommended.
- ✓ Replace toothbrushes every six months; more often if they are worn, damaged, or contaminated by another toothbrush or child.
- ✓ Do not allow children to play with or share toothbrushes.

*Clark, MB, Slayton, RL and Section on Oral Health (2014). Fluoride Use in Caries Prevention in the Primary Care Setting. *Pediatrics*,134(3), pp.626-633.
Retrieved from <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/134/3/626>

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