

Kids health: Prevention and early screenings pay off

By KIMBERLEE ROTH
Special to the Record-Eagle

While few families can escape stresses of skinned knees and croup, many other common childhood health problems can be prevented, monitored and treated if caught early.

Healthy teeth and gums

Matthew Mandeville, D.D.S., a pediatric dentist in Traverse City, said that the American and Michigan Academies of Pediatric Dentistry and the American Dental Association recommend that children be seen by their dentist by age one for diet, fluoride and hygiene counseling to prevent decay.

A combination of things, such as diet, susceptible teeth, bacteria and plaque build-up cause decay.

"It's really prevalent, often in 3- and 4-year-olds," said Mandeville. "It's a multi-factorial infection, just like heart disease."

It often starts with the baby bottle.

"We're trying to make sure kids are done nursing or off the bottle by age one, 18 months at the latest and parents should never put a child to bed with a bottle," said Mandeville.

Especially, when the bottle contains any fermentable carbohydrates such as cow, soy, goat, breast or chocolate milk, juice or pop.

"Cases of what we call 'Mountain Dew Mouth' are growing proportionately (to the availability of pop in schools), and it's a difficult thing to treat," said Mandeville. "The high acidity plus the sugar make a solution that dissolves the tooth, including the front of the tooth, where you don't usually get cavities."

Early first visits and routine care thereafter are key.

"In addition to diagnosing cavities, it's nice to see kids," said Mandeville. "Certain pathology can be detected by doing an exam. It's just like having their ears checked or a well-baby visit; we want to make sure they're healthy."

Healthy eyes

Early screening is important for maintaining vision too. Matthew Madion, M.D., an ophthalmologist with Grand Traverse Ophthalmology, recommends that children first be seen at age 2.

The most common childhood ailments Madion sees are strabismus — a crossed or wandering eye, and amblyopia — a weak or lazy eye. While strabismus is noticeable, amblyopia can go undetected for years. Often the first hint that something is wrong comes with the kindergarten screening, around age 5.

"The problem is that by then it's almost too late to treat," said Madion.

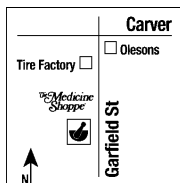
Amblyopia treatment commonly involves patching the stronger eye to make the weak eye work harder, along with glasses.

"Visual development takes place from birth to 5 or 6 years old, but as you get closer to that age, there's less chance to manipulate that. When I see a child at 6 or 7, I could patch the good eye until 18 with minimal effect. But at age 1, I could patch it for one month and get the child back to nearly normal vision," said Madion.



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