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February is National Children's Dental Health Month

San Francisco, CA — February is National Children's Dental Health Month, and the dental health professionals at the San Francisco Department of Public Health want to remind parents how important teeth are to children's overall health. Unfortunately, many children, as young as two or three years old, suffer with severely-decayed teeth. Many need to have "rotten" teeth extracted to prevent what can become serious, life-threatening infections. At a recent preschool dental screening, dental health screeners from the San Francisco Department of Public Health found 47% of the children between ages two and four had dental decay. Three of the children had abscesses and needed to be seen by a dentist within 24 hours.

In 2009, the annual screening by volunteer SF Dental Society dentists of SF Unified School District kindergarteners revealed almost half (41%) already had a history of dental decay.

Dental decay is five times more common than Asthma. Having decay in baby teeth places children at risk for a lifetime of dental problems. Without healthy teeth, children suffer from missed school days, are unable to concentrate while in school, and may not be getting the nutrition they need. In very young children, untreated dental decay can require hospital dental treatment, as toddlers and preschoolers find it very difficult to sit through a dental filling.

The good news is that dental decay is entirely preventable. Good home care, healthy eating habits and regular dental visits will help children have lifelong healthy teeth and gums. And the earlier parents start the better. Historically, dentists advised parents to wait until a child was three or four years old to have their first dental visit. Today, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Dental Association, the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry and the American Dental Hygienists' Association all agree—baby's first dental visit should be no later than one year of age.

Parents who need to find a dentist in San Francisco can call the **SF Women & Children's Health Referral Line 1-800-300-9950**, or the SF Dental Society (415) 928-7337 for a referral.

Tips for Healthy Teeth

- Take your child to a dentist twice a year ~ *starting by age one*
- Brush your child's teeth everyday, as soon as they come in ~ *An adult brushes until a child is 8 years old*
- Make those snacks healthy ones ~ *fruit, cheese, whole grains, or vegetables*
- Never put infants to sleep with a bottle or "sippy" cup filled with juice, milk or formula
- Offer safe and healthy SF "Tap Water" and fresh fruit ~ *Not juice or soda*
- Take care of your teeth ~ *Adults can spread cavity-causing bacteria to children*