



# Dickinson-Iron District Health Department

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## Dickinson-Iron District Health Department How to Maintain a Healthy Smile

Kingsford and Iron River, MI, September 30, 2015 - Most people know that brushing your teeth with fluoride toothpaste, flossing, and visiting your dentist regularly can prevent cavities. Good nutrition, fluoride rinses, and fluoride varnish are other ways to keep your child's teeth healthy. But there are other ways to protect every child's smile. According to the American Dental Association (ADA), dental sealants and mouthguards are two great ways to protect your child's teeth as they get older.

Kelly Rumpf, Health Educator notes that, "Dental sealants are a very effective way to prevent tooth decay on the chewing surfaces of back teeth in children and teens and according to the ADA, sealants can reduce the incidence of tooth decay in the chewing surfaces of back molars by 70%." Sealants are a protective plastic coating that are applied by a dentist or hygienist to the chewing surfaces of back teeth (usually permanent molars and premolars, that begin to erupt at about 6 years old.) Rumpf states that, "Even the best tooth-brushing can't always reach deep into the grooves (pits and fissures) of the back teeth. Food and bacteria can "hide" in the pits and fissures and cause tooth decay. The sealants will help prevent tooth decay in these areas by "sealing out" plaque and food particles, making the chewing surface smooth and easier to keep clean with a toothbrush." Sealants are bonded to the tooth enamel and can last for years. During routine check-ups, your dentist can check the sealants to see if they need to be touched up or reapplied. Adults can benefit from sealants also.

Another protective measure for your growing child's teeth is mouthguards. According to Dr. Frankovich, a pediatrician and local public health medical director, "Mouthguards, also called mouth protectors, should be worn by children, teens, and even adults when participating in sports or recreational activities, to protect teeth!" She notes that, "Mouthguards usually cover the upper teeth and according to the ADA, mouthguards can help cushion a blow to the face, minimizing the risk of broken teeth and injuries to the lips, tongue, face or jaw." There are three types of mouthguards: Custom-Fitted, which are made by a dentist to fit your mouth/teeth personally; Stock, which are inexpensive and come pre-formed, ready to wear; and Boil and Bite, which are softened by water (boiled) then the person would 'bite down' on the mouthguard to form it. The best choice would be a custom-fitted mouthguard from your dentist. Rumpf cites ADA studies demonstrating that, "Athletes are 60 times more likely to suffer harm to the teeth if they are not wearing a mouthguard."

Finally, dental emergencies can occur. Following are a few tips from the ADA for handling these situations:

- For a knocked-out (avulsed) permanent or adult tooth, keep it moist at all times. If you can, try placing the tooth back in the socket without touching the root. If that's not possible, place it in between your cheek and gums, in milk, or use a tooth preservation product that has the ADA Seal of Acceptance. Then, get to your dentist's office right away – preferably within 1 hour.
- For a cracked tooth, immediately rinse the mouth with warm water to clean the area. Put cold compresses on the face to keep any swelling down.
- If you bite your tongue or lip, clean the area gently with water and apply a cold compress.

- For toothaches, rinse the mouth with warm water to clean it out. Gently use dental floss to remove any food caught between the teeth. Do not put aspirin on the aching tooth or gum tissues. See your dentist as soon as possible.
- For objects stuck in the mouth, try to gently remove with floss but do not try to remove it with sharp or pointed instruments.
- Use a scissors, NEVER your teeth, to cut things. Don't chew on ice, popcorn kernels, or hard candy as these objects can crack your teeth.

The U.P. Wide Smiles Oral Health Initiative, a collaboration between the Upper Peninsula's six health departments and the Superior Health Foundation, remind everyone to brush and floss daily, use a fluoride toothpaste, eat nutritious foods, and don't forget to visit your dentist regularly so you and your child's teeth will last a lifetime. Please visit [www.superiorhealthfoundation.org](http://www.superiorhealthfoundation.org) for more information.