Finish their brushing every night until about 8.

The Japanese Society of Pediatric Dentistry says children need a parent to finish their brushing before bed until about age 8. The first permanent molars (the "6-year molars") are most prone to decay in the first 1–2 years after they come in.[1]

What to do at each age

When teeth start to come in

Getting used to it

Practise mouth care with gauze or cotton

Once they're used to a toothbrush, you brush their teeth[2]

Ages 1–2

Lying down

Lay their head on your lap and brush

Between the upper front teeth and along the gum line are prone to decay[3]

Age 3 to school age

Child, then you

Your child practises brushing, then you finish[4]

Add floss once they're used to it

Ages 6–8

Focus: back teeth

The 6-year molars come in

Most prone to decay in the first 1–2 years[1]

Age 8 onward

Check sometimes

Phase out nightly finishing. Check now and then for missed spots

Even on days you can't brush after every meal, **keep the one before bed**[3]

Your help is needed

A Japanese study of over 70,000 four-year-olds found that children whose parents finished their brushing only "sometimes" tended to have more decay than those whose parents did it "every day".[5] Fluoride toothpaste also worked better when an adult supervised brushing.[6] **Use fluoride toothpaste when you finish their brushing.**

Three places to check

Most decay starts in back-tooth grooves and between teeth[7]

1 Back teeth

The grooves and between the teeth. Once they're used to it, use **floss** between teeth.[8]

2 Inner sides (tongue side)

Children brushing alone tend to do only the outer sides.

3 Their non-dominant side

Children brushing alone tend to miss this side.

Position and grip

- ☑ While they're small, lay their head on your lap and brush with them lying down
- ☑ Hold the toothbrush like a pen
- ☑ Gently lift the lip with one finger. Hold the small fold above the upper front teeth with your index finger so the brush doesn't hurt it.[3]

A separate brush for finishing

Children have been hurt by toothbrushes poking their throat. Choose a child's brush designed to prevent this. **Don't let your child hold the finishing brush**; keep it out of reach. Stay with your child when they brush, and have them sit on the floor.[9]

From your clinic A clinic stamp is fine for contact details

Phone _____ **Next visit** ☐ Check-up ☐ Fluoride ☐ Other Date: Time:

Opening hours _____ **Brush well** ☐ Back teeth ☐ Inner sides ☐ Between teeth ☐ Other ( )

Notes _____

References [1] Japanese Society of Pediatric Dentistry. Recommendations to prevent declining child health during COVID-19 school closures. Apr 2020. [2] Japanese Society for Oral Health, Japanese Society of Pediatric Dentistry, et al. Recommended use of fluoride toothpaste (joint statement of 4 societies). Jan 2023. [3] Japanese Society of Pediatric Dentistry. Q&A on children's mouths and teeth: birth to about age 2 (accessed Oct 2026). [4] NHS Scotland Childsmile. Toothbrushing (accessed Oct 2026). [5] Miura Y, et al. BMC Pediatr. 2025;25(1):613. [6] Marinho VC, et al. Cochrane Database Syst Rev. 2003;(1):CD002278. [7] Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, e-health net. Features of tooth decay by life stage (accessed Oct 2026). [8] Japanese Society of Pediatric Dentistry, Kanto branch. Home checkpoints while the 3-year dental check-up is postponed. [9] Consumer Affairs Agency, Japan. Beware of throat injuries from toothbrushes in children. Jun 2021.

Written by a practising dentist (Zubora Ha Lab, Japan) · November 2026 edition

If your clinic's instructions differ, follow your clinic. Free to use; terms of use: zubora-lab.com/sheets/ (Japanese)

A tough night? Go back one step. See the dentist before it hurts.

If your child resists, take it step by step

STEP 1 Just touch the brush to their mouth ▸ **STEP 2** Brush the front teeth only ▸ **STEP 3** Brush the back teeth too ▸ **STEP 4** Add floss once they're used to it

You don't have to brush everything at once. The goal is **for your child to learn that finishing brushing isn't scary**. If tonight doesn't go well, just go back one step.

Tips while brushing

Sometimes they resist because it hurts or feels uncomfortable

1 Talk to them
Talk gently or sing, and smile.[3]

2 Brush together
Brush your own teeth with them.[3]

3 Be quick lying down
Keep it short and efficient.[3]

4 Don't press too hard
Brushing too hard can hurt.[3]

5 Avoid the lip fold
Protect the small fold above the upper front teeth (upper labial frenum) with a finger.[3]

6 Pause if they struggle
Take the brush out and let them swallow the saliva.[3]

Common myths

Myth

"If they hate it, it's better not to force it."
Don't stop; go back one step. Just like a daily bath, make cleaning the mouth a daily habit.[3]

Myth

"My child brushes on their own, so it's fine."
Children can't remove all the plaque by themselves yet. Let them brush, then finish for them.[8]

Myth

"They've started school, so we're done."
That's just when the 6-year molars come in. Keep going every night until about 8, and check now and then after that.[1]

See the dentist before it hurts

Come early and get used to it

If the first visit is when it already hurts, there's no time to get used to the dentist before treatment. The Japanese Society of Pediatric Dentistry recommends regular visits from when the lower front teeth come in, and **fluoride application** once the upper and lower front teeth are in.[3]

See a dentist soon if

- a tooth has a **black dot, a brown area or a cloudy white area**
- your child says a tooth **hurts**, or that cold or sweet things **sting**
- the **gums are swollen**
- the 18-month or 3-year health check found decay or possible decay
- your child has **never** been to a dentist

Clinic contact (stamp is fine)

Notes

References

[1] Japanese Society of Pediatric Dentistry. Recommendations to prevent declining child health during COVID-19 school closures. Apr 2020. [3] Japanese Society of Pediatric Dentistry. Q&A on children's mouths and teeth: birth to about age 2 (accessed Oct 2026). [8] Japanese Society of Pediatric Dentistry, Kanto branch. Home checkpoints while the 3-year dental check-up is postponed.

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