Points to remember

- Baby teeth are important, so take good care of your child's teeth.
- Teething should not cause severe illness. If your child has a fever or diarrhoea, see your doctor.
- Avoid choking by always being present when your child is eating.
- A low fluoride toothpaste is recommended for children under 6 years of age.
Baby teeth
Healthy baby teeth allow a toddler to enjoy a nutritious diet, aid in proper speech development, enhance the child’s appearance and contribute to good self-esteem. Baby teeth also help to maintain the space for the permanent teeth, guiding them into their correct position. Early loss of a baby tooth can reduce the space for the permanent tooth, resulting in crowded permanent teeth.

Teething
A baby’s first tooth usually appears around 6 months of age. However, this can vary greatly. By about the age of 3 years a child should have a full set of 20 baby teeth.

This diagram is a general guide to when the baby teeth should appear in the mouth.

It is not uncommon for babies to experience some discomfort when new teeth break through the gums. This may include:

- red swollen gums, flushed cheeks and dribbling
- irritability or restlessness
- a slight fever
- pulling of the ear on the same side as the erupting tooth
- finger and fist sucking.

Mild teething problems may be eased by the baby chewing on hard objects such as chilled teething rings or sugar free rusks. Alternatively you can give your baby a dummy or wet flannel to bite on. It may also help to rub your child’s gums with a clean finger or the back of a cold spoon.

Ask your dentist or doctor before using any pain reliever or oral gel containing anaesthetic, or if problems persist.

Cleaning baby’s mouth
Your baby’s gums can be wiped with a clean, damp cloth after each feed. Start cleaning the teeth as soon as they appear in the mouth. At first, use a clean damp cloth and when a few teeth are present introduce a small, soft toothbrush and no toothpaste.

Use a small pea-sized amount of low fluoride toothpaste from 18 months of age. Then from 6 years of age use a small amount of standard fluoride toothpaste. Encourage your child to spit out, not swallow and not rinse after brushing.