

# Pointers For Parents

## Protecting Children's Teeth At Home And At School

(NAPSA)—Learning about what kids drink at school may help keep their teeth healthy.

Soda vending machines are in many of the nation's junior high and high schools. Between classes, many students drink soda because they are thirsty, while some want the caffeine some of the beverages contain. Whatever their reasons, it is likely no student drinks soda looking for tooth decay—although that's what dentists say many of them get.

Since 1995, soda companies have approached schools with lucrative, long-term deals called "pouring rights." The contracts let soda makers exclusively sell their brand in a school in exchange for educational funding.

Citizen groups and dental care professionals have criticized soda companies for this action and have accused them of "pushing" their products to kids in school.

Many dentists are worried that the increase in soda consumption is leading to an increase in tooth decay among teenagers.

### What Dentists Say Kids Can Do To Protect Their Teeth

- After drinking soda, kids should rinse their mouths with water to wash away excess sugar.



**Drinking soda through a straw can help protect teeth from sugar.**

The sugar eventually turns acidic and damages teeth.

- It is a good idea for kids to drink soda from a straw. This can reduce the amount of sugar that passes over their teeth and can prevent tooth surfaces from being stained.

- Kids should drink soda from a can, rather than a bottle with a replaceable cap. This can help deter soda-sipping throughout the day.

- Chewing sugarless gum can help protect teeth. When gum is chewed, the regular amount of saliva in the mouth—which is a natural buffer against cavities—can triple.

"It is easy to forget that pop may be harmful," says Dr.

William Chase, DDS, FAGD. Chase is spokesperson for the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD), an organization of general dentists that works to continue dental health education. "Many parents just don't ask what beverages their kids are drinking and how much. We are reverting to a pre-fluoride condition in America," he says.

Studies show an increase in soda consumption over the last three decades. Soda consumption has increased from 22.2 gallons of cola per person annually in 1970, to 56 gallons in 1999—that means about 14 billion gallons of soda were consumed in the U.S. that year alone.

"We are not trying to ban vending machines. We want to educate people on what soda consumption can do to kids' teeth," says Dr. Chase.

Dental health information is available through AGD's Smile-Line. Consumers can have their questions concerning oral health personally answered by an Academy dentist in either English or Spanish. The service can be accessed at [www.agd.org](http://www.agd.org). Visitors to the site simply click on the big red smile, post a question and receive a response in 24 hours.

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*Note To Editors: On Thursday, August 2, 2001, from 8 am to 8 pm EDT, consumers can call 1-800 SMILE-33 to have their oral health questions answered immediately. The hotline is sponsored by the Academy with help from DENTSPLY International and Kodak Dental Products.*