

SproutSmile

Questions to Ask a Pediatric Dentist

Smart questions about the office, costs, and your child's care



A free parent guide from SproutSmile - sproutsmile.com

SproutSmile helps you find a pediatric dentist for your child, free and in your language. We are not a dental office and this is not medical advice.

How to choose a pediatric dentist

Choosing a pediatric dentist can feel stressful—especially for a first visit. This guide walks you through what to look for and what to ask, so you can feel more confident booking your child's appointment.

Start with the big goal: safe, gentle care for kids

A pediatric dentist focuses on children's dental needs—from baby teeth to teen teeth. When you're choosing an office, you want more than a good diagnosis. You want a calm, kid-friendly experience and a team that explains things clearly to you.

SproutSmile is a FREE service that helps you find and get matched with a pediatric dentist in your area. We collect contact details only. We don't provide dental care and we can't give medical advice, but we can help you compare options and book your child's first visit with more confidence.

What to look for in a pediatric dentist

Credentials matter. Look for a pediatric dentist (not just a general dentist) and confirm they are licensed in your state. You can usually find this information on the office website or through your state dental board.

A kid-friendly office makes a big difference. Pay attention to details like how the waiting room feels, whether they use child-sized chairs, if they explain procedures in simple terms, and how staff supports nervous families. Some offices are used to parents who are non-native English speakers—so see if they offer translation services or can communicate clearly.

You'll also want an office that can handle different needs. Pediatric dentists often work with behavior strategies that help children feel safe. Talk to the office about comfort options, and ask what they recommend for children who are very anxious.

Insurance and coverage are part of planning. Many kids' preventive dental visits are covered by insurance, Medicaid, or CHIP when your family qualifies. Coverage rules vary by state and plan, and costs can differ by office and location. Before you book, ask what is covered and what you might pay. You can also read more in our guide on costs.

What happens at the first visit (so you can ask better questions)

For a first dental visit (often by age 1 or when the first tooth appears), many pediatric offices start with a check of your child's mouth, gums, teeth, and bite. They may also do a gentle exam of oral habits and discuss nutrition and cavity prevention.

Depending on your child's age and needs, the dentist may recommend an X-ray or other preventive care. Fluoride is commonly used to help prevent cavities, and sealants are another cavity-fighting option for some children.

If your child feels scared, the dental team may use comfort approaches. Some offices use nitrous oxide (“laughing gas”) or other sedation options, depending on the dentist’s judgment and your child’s situation. If you’re worried about anxiety, ask what comfort options are available and what to expect.

Questions to ask before you book

Call or message the office and ask questions that help you feel prepared. Here are helpful ones:

- Do you see children of my child’s age? - Are you a pediatric dental practice (pediatric dentist on site)? - What should we expect at the first visit? - Do you offer translation services or staff who can help with my language? - How do you help children who are anxious or afraid? - What comfort options are available (for example, nitrous oxide) and how do you decide what’s appropriate? - Do you take my insurance? If not, do you work with Medicaid or CHIP? - What costs should we expect for the first exam and preventive care? (Ask for an estimate.)

If you’re trying to keep the appointment smooth, also ask what to do before the visit. Some offices want you to arrive early, bring prior dental records (if you have them), or complete forms online.



Your child's first dental visit

A first dental visit can feel scary, but it's usually short, gentle, and mostly about learning and prevention. Here's what typically happens and when to go—plus tips to keep it calm for your child.

Overview: what your child's first dental visit is for

A baby or toddler's first dental visit is a chance to start dental care early. It helps the dentist check how teeth and gums are developing, learn about your child's needs, and guide you on daily habits that can prevent cavities.

In the U.S., a common recommendation is to schedule the first visit by age 1 or by the time the first tooth comes in (whichever happens first). If your child already has teeth, don't wait—call and ask for an early “new patient” visit.

We're SproutSmile. We're a FREE service that helps you get matched with a pediatric dentist in your area. We can help you choose a dentist that sees young children and fits your family's needs.

What to expect at the visit (usually quick and gentle)

Every practice is a little different, but a first visit for a baby or toddler often focuses on comfort and prevention. The dentist (or pediatric dental team) will look at your child's teeth and gums, check for early signs of cavities, and make sure everything is developing normally.

The team may also talk with you about feeding and tooth-friendly routines, how to brush, and fluoride. Many dentists recommend fluoride toothpaste and may recommend fluoride varnish during visits to help strengthen tooth enamel.

If your child is very young, the dentist may not do X-rays right away. If imaging is needed, the team will explain what's recommended for your child's age and situation. For comfort, some kids may be given nitrous oxide (“laughing gas”) or other sedation options by the dentist when appropriate—your dentist will tell you what they offer and what they recommend.

Tip: the visit may feel mostly like “getting to know you and your child” rather than a long exam. It's okay if your child is nervous. The goal is a positive start.

When to go and how to choose a dentist who sees babies

If you're wondering when to schedule, a good rule is: aim for the first visit by age 1 or when the first tooth appears. This timing helps dentists catch problems early and build a routine.

When you call, ask if the office sees infants and toddlers regularly. You can also ask about how they help kids feel comfortable—things like short appointments, a “tell-show-do” approach, or a parent-friendly plan for calming your child.

To find a pediatric dentist that fits your needs, you can use get matched with a dentist on SproutSmile. You can also read how to choose a pediatric dentist for helpful questions to ask before you book.

Cost range and how insurance, Medicaid, and CHIP can help

The cost of a first dental visit varies by location, the dentist's pricing, your child's age, and what's done at that visit. In many cases, preventive visits may be covered by dental insurance.

If you're using Medicaid or CHIP (children's health coverage programs), children's dental benefits are often available for eligible families. Coverage rules vary by state, and the exact services covered can differ.

For a clearer sense of what families typically pay, see costs in your area. Any numbers you see are estimates, not a guaranteed quote. The best next step is to ask the dental office what the expected visit includes and what your plan covers.



Kids' dental insurance, Medicaid & CHIP

Dental care can feel confusing when you're trying to find coverage for your child. This guide explains how kids' dental insurance, Medicaid, and CHIP usually work—and what you can do next to get answers.

The big picture: how dental coverage for kids works

Kids' dental coverage usually falls into three buckets: private dental insurance (through an employer or the marketplace), Medicaid, and CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program). The rules and benefits can vary by state and plan, so it helps to confirm details with your child's coverage and the dental office.

Most coverage focuses on prevention—things like checkups, cleanings, and exam visits—because stopping cavities early is easier than fixing them later. Baby teeth matter too. Cavities in baby teeth can affect eating, speech, and space for adult teeth.

We're a free service that helps you find a pediatric dentist and get ready for your child's first visit. We don't provide dental care or medical advice, but we can help you connect with the right office to ask coverage questions.

Private dental insurance: what's usually covered for children

Many private plans cover routine preventive care for children, often with low or no cost at the point of service. Commonly covered items include exams, cleanings, and X-rays when needed.

Other services—like fillings, sealants, fluoride treatments, and orthodontic evaluations—may be covered differently depending on the plan. Some services may require prior approval, have copays, or follow limits (for example, how often certain preventive treatments are covered).

If you're unsure, ask the dental office for the office's "estimated patient cost" based on your specific plan. You can also call the insurance number on your card and ask which pediatric dentists are in-network for your child.

Medicaid and CHIP: coverage is often available, even if you're not sure what to ask

Medicaid and CHIP can help cover children's dental care for eligible families. In many states, dental benefits include regular preventive visits, and coverage may also include fillings and other basic dental services.

Because states run these programs, the exact benefits and how you use them can differ. Some families have dental managed care plans, while others work directly with Medicaid. Sometimes you need to pick a dentist that accepts your plan.

If your child has Medicaid or CHIP, ask the dentist office these practical questions: Do you accept our plan? Are routine preventive visits covered? Are there any limits on sealants or fluoride? What paperwork do you need from us?

What to do if you have no insurance (or your coverage is unclear)

If you don't currently have dental insurance, you still have options. Some families qualify for Medicaid or CHIP based on income and household size. If you're new to the US, it's especially helpful to ask for local help—rules and enrollment steps can differ.

Many pediatric dental offices offer payment options for uninsured families. Terms vary by office, and any cost will depend on what your child needs. Before your visit, ask for a clear estimate for an exam and X-rays, and ask about discount programs or flexible payment plans.

If you want to plan ahead, check common costs at a high level here: [Kids' dental costs: what families often pay.](#)



Your quick action list

- 1 Decide what your child needs (first visit, cleaning, a worry, or an emergency).
- 2 Get matched, free, with pediatric dental offices near you at sproutsmile.com.
- 3 Ask each office whether they accept your insurance or Medicaid/CHIP.
- 4 Ask how they work with children and what a visit will cost.
- 5 Choose the office that feels right - you make every decision about your child's care.



Find a pediatric dentist near you, free, at sproutsmile.com