Paediatric Dentist or General Dentist for Kids | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/child-see-paediatric-dentist/

Details:

Both can look after your child's teeth. A paediatric dentist is a registered specialist who has completed additional postgraduate study focused on the dental and medical needs of babies, children and adolescents. A general dentist cares for patients of all ages and treats many children every week. At Core Dental we see children from age 2, and your dentist will tell you if a specialist paediatric dentist would suit your child's needs. Recommendations depend on an individual examination.

What is the difference between a paediatric dentist and a general dentist?

A general dentist completes a university dental degree and is registered to treat people of all ages. A paediatric dentist is a general dentist who has then completed an approved postgraduate qualification in paediatric dentistry, concentrating on the medical and dental aspects of children's oral health. The Dental Board of Australia sets entry requirements for specialist registration rather than a course length — a qualification in the specialty, all the requirements for general registration as a dentist, and "a minimum of two years general dental practice" — so we do not publish a figure for how many years that training takes. That includes growth and development of the jaws and teeth, behaviour guidance, and the care of children with additional needs.

Neither choice is wrong. For most children, regular check-ups and cleans with a general dentist are all that is needed. A specialist becomes useful when a child's situation is more complex or when they need extra support to feel at ease.

What early dental problems does a paediatric dentist look after?

Paediatric dentists focus on problems that tend to appear early in life. These include:

tooth decay in baby teeth, including decay linked to prolonged bottle use at night

habits such as long-term dummy use or thumb sucking, which can affect how the teeth and jaws develop

injuries to the teeth and mouth in toddlers and young children

routine care from infancy through to adolescence

early recognition of bite and orthodontic problems

Your general dentist at Core Dental can check for most of these during a routine visit. If something needs specialist input, we will explain why and arrange it with you.

When might a child benefit from seeing a paediatric dentist?

We may suggest a specialist visit in situations such as these:

Dental anxiety. Some children find the dental setting hard to cope with. A paediatric dentist is trained in child behaviour guidance and works to create a calm, child-friendly visit.

Complex dental needs. Your general dentist may notice developmental differences in the teeth, or gum problems in a child, that call for specialist assessment.

Medical, physical or developmental conditions. Children who have additional health needs can benefit from a dentist with extra training in this area.

Close monitoring. A specialist can track growth, development and early orthodontic concerns where your dentist thinks this is useful.

How do we make the dental visit child-friendly?

Children are not small adults, and a first dental experience shapes how they feel about the dentist later in life. At Core Dental we believe making the dentist a positive experience for your child is crucial to setting good oral health habits. We take the time to explain what we are doing in simple words and to go at your child's pace.

Seeing the same friendly dentist over time also helps a child feel comfortable. Children who feel relaxed are more likely to listen when we show them how to brush and talk about foods that are kind to teeth.

What about sedation or general anaesthesia for children?

Children cannot always manage their fears the way adults do, and some need extra support to cope with treatment. Options your dentist may discuss include behaviour guidance, and for some children a mild form of sedation such as nitrous oxide, sometimes called laughing gas, where this is suitable and available. Nitrous oxide keeps a child awake and recovery is usually quick. Very young children, or children who need extensive treatment, are sometimes referred for treatment under general anaesthesia in a hospital setting.

Whether sedation is suitable depends on your child's age, health and the treatment needed. Please ask us at your visit, and we will talk through the options and any referral that may be appropriate.

Can the whole family see us in the one place?

Yes. Many of our clinics look after parents and children in the same practice, so family appointments can be arranged around school and work. Where a specialist paediatric dentist is available, availability differs from clinic to clinic, so please confirm when you book.

How does the Child Dental Benefits Schedule help?

Eligible children aged 0 to 17 may be able to have basic dental services bulk billed under the Child Dental Benefits Schedule, which is a Medicare benefit with a set limit over a two-year period. We can help you check eligibility when you book. See our guide to the Child Dental Benefits Schedule for more detail.

Paediatric dentistry is a recognised specialty, and here is what that means

"Children's dentist" and "paediatric dentist" are not the same claim. One describes an interest; the other is a registration category with published requirements.

It is one of the thirteen. The Dental Board of Australia: "There are 13 dental specialties in Australia which are approved by the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council (the Ministerial Council)."

Paediatric dentistry is on that list.

What holding it requires. "All applicants for specialist registration must be qualified and meet the requirements set out in the Board's Specialist registration standard. These requirements include that applicants have: completed a minimum of two years general dental practice (this requirement may be achieved by experience outside Australia, subject to assessment and approval by the Board), and met all other requirements for general registration as a dentist." And: "All applicants for specialist registration must hold a qualification in the specialty and meet all the requirements for general registration as a dentist."

How to check a claim. "Ahpra publishes an online register of all dental practitioners that provides the profession and the public with up-to-date information about a dental practitioner's registration status. This register also includes details of the specialty or specialties for dentists who hold specialist registration."

That register is the answer to "is this person actually a paediatric dentist". It is public and current.

But most children's dental care does not need a specialist, and the published advice says so. The Victorian Department of Health describes who can do a young child's check: "This check can be done by an a qualified dental practitioner, such as an oral health therapist, dentist, dental therapist or dental hygienist." And: "It might also be done by a trained non-dental health professional, such as a maternal and child health nurse, doctor or practice nurse. These professionals will refer your child to a dental clinic if necessary."

Its decay page for young children says the same: other mouth checks "can also be done by a trained non-dental professional such as a maternal and child health nurse, general practitioner, or Aboriginal Health Practitioner".

So the published pathway starts broad and narrows only if something is found. A referral is the mechanism, not the default.

Sources: Dental Board of Australia, Specialist Registration, dentalboard.gov.au (the page states it was reviewed 18/03/2025); Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Dental checks for young children, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 11 February 2026); Tooth decay - young children, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 11 February 2026). All accessed 6 November 2026.

When a referral is likely, and what it is for

Rather than guessing at when a child needs specialist care, the useful thing is the published list of situations where something beyond a routine check is involved.

Decay that has progressed. "In most cases early childhood decay is not picked up until the later, more serious stages. At this time it cannot be reversed and the child may need major dental treatment."

Difficulty tolerating treatment. The Department's dental anxiety advice lists "a specialist in special needs dentistry" among the places to get help, and is specific about children: "Children who have had bad dental experiences can likely overcome their fear if they are supported during further dental visits."

For severe cases it describes four levels of medical management — "relative analgesia (happy gas), anxiety relieving medication, conscious sedation (twilight sedation) or general anaesthesia" — and notes that "treatment under a general anaesthetic is carried out in a hospital setting by the dentist and an anaesthetist". It also cautions: "A general anaesthetic can be a good option for some people, but it doesn't help you learn coping strategies or get you used to going to the dentist."

Bite and jaw development. Orthodontics Australia, the information service of the Australian Society of Orthodontists, recommends "children visit a registered specialist orthodontist for an assessment between the ages of 7-10 years old", and lists signs suggesting a visit: "Losing baby teeth prematurely due to cavities (decay) or trauma"; "Snoring or consistent mouth-breathing"; "Teeth that don't meet properly when your child bites together"; "Protruding and/or overcrowded teeth"; "Difficulties with biting or chewing"; "Thumb sucking"; "A family history of impacted or missing teeth."

Injuries. "Teeth that have been chipped or cracked may or may not be painful. Either way, you should see an oral health professional as soon as possible because early repair can improve the survival of a damaged tooth." And for a knocked-out baby tooth the instruction is specific: "Never try to put a baby (deciduous or primary) tooth back in the gum if it is knocked out. This can damage the developing permanent tooth underneath the gum."

Grinding, where the published position is reassuring. "Because children's teeth and jaws change and grow so quickly it's not usually a damaging habit that requires treatment and most outgrow it as they get older", and "a dentist or other oral health professional is best placed to make a full assessment of each child's situation".

What the routine visits achieve in the meantime. The Department's reasons for children's dental checks: "the early signs of tooth decay and other problems can easily be missed by families"; "small problems can be treated before they become larger problems"; "they give you a chance to ask questions or talk about any concerns you may have"; "your dental practitioner can help your child avoid decay with treatments such as fluoride application and dental sealants"; "children get to know the dental staff and become familiar with the process of visiting the dental clinic."

On cost, there are two funded routes. The Child Dental Benefits Schedule "covers some or all of the cost of basic dental treatments over a two year period for eligible children", where a child is eligible if "they are aged 0-17 years, are eligible for Medicare and you receive Family Tax Benefit Part A or another relevant Australian Government payment". And "all children aged 0-12 can use public dental services at a low cost or for free, depending on their eligibility".

And how often. "Everyone has different oral health needs and risk levels that determine how often they should have a check-up. Talk with your dental practitioner about how often your child needs a check-up."

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Tooth decay - young children, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 11 February 2026); Dental checks for young children, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 11 February 2026); Dental anxiety and phobia, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 22 October 2025); Dental injuries, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 4 August 2026); Teeth grinding, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 17 October 2025); Orthodontics Australia (Australian Society of Orthodontists), When to see an Orthodontist, orthodonticsaustralia.org.au . All accessed 6 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

At what age should my child first see a dentist?

We welcome children from age 2 at Core Dental, and sooner if you have a concern such as a dark spot, pain or an injury to a tooth. An early, relaxed visit lets your child meet the team and lets us check how the teeth are coming through.

Does my child need to see a paediatric dentist if they are anxious?

Not always. Many anxious children are well looked after by a patient general dentist who goes slowly and explains each step. If your child remains very fearful, your dentist may suggest a specialist who has additional training in managing children's anxiety.

Can a general dentist treat my child's cavities?

Yes. General dentists routinely treat decay in baby and adult teeth in children. If a child needs treatment that is complex, or finds it very hard to cooperate, your dentist may suggest a specialist or

referral for additional support.

Are children with special needs treated by paediatric dentists?

Paediatric dentists receive additional training in caring for children with special healthcare needs. Many general dentists also care for these children. Tell us about your child's needs when you book so we can plan a suitable appointment.

How do I prepare my child for a dental visit?

Talk about the visit in a positive, matter-of-fact way and avoid words like needle or pain. Bring any medical information and a list of medicines. Let us know about any worries your child has so our team can plan around them.

Is paediatric dentistry a formally recognised specialty?

Yes. The Dental Board of Australia lists it among the "13 dental specialties in Australia which are approved by the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council (the Ministerial Council)".

What does holding that specialty require?

Applicants must "hold a qualification in the specialty and meet all the requirements for general registration as a dentist", including having "completed a minimum of two years general dental practice".

How can I check that someone really holds it?

On the public register. "Ahpra publishes an online register of all dental practitioners ... This register also includes details of the specialty or specialties for dentists who hold specialist registration."

Does my child need to see a specialist?

Usually not. The Victorian Department of Health describes a young child's check as something that "can be done by an a qualified dental practitioner, such as an oral health therapist, dentist, dental therapist or dental hygienist", and notes it "might also be done by a trained non-dental health professional, such as a maternal and child health nurse, doctor or practice nurse".

Who else can check a young child's mouth?

"A trained non-dental professional such as a maternal and child health nurse, general practitioner, or Aboriginal Health Practitioner." The Department adds that "these professionals will refer your child to a dental clinic if necessary".

What situations usually lead to a referral?

Decay found late, where "it cannot be reversed and the child may need major dental treatment"; difficulty tolerating treatment; bite and jaw development; and injuries.

What if my child cannot cope with treatment at all?

The Department lists "a specialist in special needs dentistry" among the places to get help, and four levels of medical management: "relative analgesia (happy gas), anxiety relieving medication, conscious sedation (twilight sedation) or general anaesthesia". It cautions that a general anaesthetic "doesn't help you learn coping strategies or get you used to going to the dentist".

When should a child see an orthodontist?

Orthodontics Australia recommends an assessment "between the ages of 7-10 years old", and lists signs including "snoring or consistent mouth-breathing", "teeth that don't meet properly when your child bites together", "protruding and/or overcrowded teeth", "difficulties with biting or chewing", thumb sucking, and "a family history of impacted or missing teeth".

What if my child chips a tooth?

Be seen promptly, pain or not: "Teeth that have been chipped or cracked may or may not be painful. Either way, you should see an oral health professional as soon as possible."

What if a baby tooth is knocked out?

Do not put it back. "Never try to put a baby (deciduous or primary) tooth back in the gum if it is knocked out. This can damage the developing permanent tooth underneath the gum."

My child grinds their teeth. Do they need a specialist?

Usually not. "Because children's teeth and jaws change and grow so quickly it's not usually a damaging habit that requires treatment and most outgrow it as they get older", and "a dentist or other oral health professional is best placed to make a full assessment of each child's situation".

What help is there with the cost?

The Child Dental Benefits Schedule "covers some or all of the cost of basic dental treatments over a two year period for eligible children" aged "0-17 years" who are eligible for Medicare and whose family receives "Family Tax Benefit Part A or another relevant Australian Government payment". And "all children aged 0-12 can use public dental services at a low cost or for free, depending on their eligibility".

How often should my child be seen?

"Everyone has different oral health needs and risk levels that determine how often they should have a check-up. Talk with your dental practitioner about how often your child needs a check-up."

Related services and further reading

Children's dentistry at Core Dental

Paediatric dentistry

Why we have specialist paediatric dentists

Child Dental Benefits Schedule explained

5 tips to help with dental anxiety in children

Helping a frightened child at the dentist

Top tips for children's dental hygiene

Children's braces and Invisalign

What to do if a tooth is knocked out

How can we help?

If you are unsure whether your child should see a general dentist or a paediatric dentist, call us on 13 13 16 or book online at your nearest Core Dental clinic. Tell us your child's age and any worries, and we will arrange the right visit. You can also read about what to expect at your first Core Dental appointment or learn more about our general dentistry services.

Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Open six days a week: Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans, with HICAPS on-site claiming.

Call 13 13 16 or book online.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online via coredental.com.au, or call 13 13 16
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday 8.00am to 1.30pm (Bayside Saturday 8.30am to 1.30pm), Sunday closed
Clinics	Southbank , South Melbourne , Caroline Springs , Carrum Downs , Epping , Wyndham , Berwick , Bayside , Glenferrie

Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. This information is general in nature and is intended for people over 18. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

How old should a child be for a first visit at Core Dental?

Core Dental welcomes children from age 2 for their first visit, and earlier if you notice a dark spot, pain or a tooth injury. Call 13 13 16 and our team will arrange a gentle introductory appointment.

What is a paediatric dentist?

A paediatric dentist is a registered dental specialist who holds a qualification in paediatric dentistry, focused on the oral health of babies, children and adolescents, including behaviour guidance and early bite and growth concerns. The Dental Board of Australia requires a qualification in the specialty, all the requirements for general registration as a dentist, and "a minimum of two years general dental practice" before specialist registration; it sets those requirements rather than a course length.

Can Core Dental general dentists treat children?

Yes. Our general dentists see children for check-ups, cleans, fissure sealants and fillings. If your child has complex needs or is very anxious, we may suggest a specialist paediatric dentist where one is available.

Which children may benefit from a specialist paediatric dentist?

Children with strong dental anxiety, complex dental or developmental needs, medical or disability related needs, or who need close monitoring of growth and early orthodontic concerns may benefit. Your Core Dental dentist can advise after examining your child.

Can Core Dental bulk bill children's dental care?

Core Dental bulk bills eligible children aged 0 to 17 under the Child Dental Benefits Schedule for covered basic services, within the schedule's limit. Our team can help check eligibility when you book.

How do I book a children's appointment at Core Dental?

Call Core Dental on 13 13 16 or book online through coredental.com.au. We are open Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings, and our team will help you choose a suitable clinic and time.

Does nitrous oxide sedation suit every child?

No. Nitrous oxide may suit some children, depending on age, health and the treatment planned. Our dentists assess each child and discuss options, including referral where more support is appropriate, before any decision is made.