White Spots on Childrens Adult Teeth | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/childs-adult-teeth-white-spots/

Details:

White spots on a child's adult teeth are most often caused by dental fluorosis, which can develop when a child takes in too much fluoride while the permanent teeth are forming, typically in the first three years of life. Other causes include early tooth decay near the gum line, inherited conditions, and illness or injury in early childhood. At Core Dental we recommend having any new white spots checked by a dentist, who can work out the likely cause and explain your options.

What is the most common cause of white spots on a child's adult teeth?

The most common cause is dental fluorosis. It develops when a child takes in more fluoride than is ideal while their adult teeth are forming under the gums, typically during the first three years of life, when the front teeth are developing. Mild fluorosis usually appears as faint white flecks or lines and does not usually affect how the tooth works, though people may be unhappy with how it looks.

What factors can contribute to dental fluorosis?

Several things can influence it:

the amount of fluoride in the water supply where the child lived in early childhood

the use of fluoride supplements during this period

the type of toothpaste used, for example children's toothpaste compared with adult toothpaste

whether the child regularly swallowed toothpaste while brushing

Fluoride remains a valuable way to protect teeth from decay. The aim is to use the right amount for the child's age. Our dentists can advise on suitable toothpaste for your child. You can read more in what fluoride is and what it is used for .

Can genetics cause white marks on a child's teeth?

Yes. Some inherited conditions affect the way tooth enamel forms and can leave white marks. This is less common than fluorosis. In these cases both the baby (milk) teeth and the adult teeth are typically affected, and brothers, sisters or other family members may show similar markings. If this sounds familiar, mention your family history to your dentist.

What does it mean if white spots appear near the gum line?

White spots close to the gum line on a child's permanent teeth can be a sign of the earliest stage of tooth decay. These areas are porous, and if they are left untreated they can progress to cavities that need to be filled. The encouraging news is that early decay can often be managed with preventive care, such as improved brushing, suitable fluoride products and diet advice, so early review matters.

Can illness or injury in early childhood cause white spots on adult teeth?

Yes. Illness or physical injury during the first two years of a child's life can disturb normal tooth development. The incisors and molars may not form normally, and the affected teeth may later show white spots. Sometimes the child reports sensitivity or pain from these teeth, and in some cases the teeth can break down. There is a link between the timing of the illness or injury and the part of the developing tooth that is affected.

Are white spots harmful, and what can be done about them?

White spots are porous, so they can absorb colour from foods and drinks and gradually turn brown. These stains generally do not affect the health of the teeth, but some people find them unsightly. Depending on the cause and severity, a dentist may discuss:

microabrasion, a technique that gently removes a thin surface layer of enamel

tooth whitening, which can improve how the teeth look

composite veneers for more noticeable cases, which can later be replaced by porcelain veneers once the child is over 16 years of age

If the spots are early decay, preventive treatment can often halt its progress. If decay is left untreated, cavities can develop and need fillings. Results vary and the right option depends on an individual examination.

Can white spots also affect adults?

Yes. When illness or injury in early childhood has disturbed tooth development, the white spots may only become obvious in adulthood, and the tooth can sometimes break down. Managing these cases is complex. Treatment can range from fillings in mildly affected teeth to stainless steel crowns, or carefully timed removal of badly affected teeth. Your dentist will assess each tooth and explain your options.

How can we help?

If you have noticed white spots on your child's teeth, our dentists can examine them, explain the likely cause and talk through care options at any of our nine clinics. We welcome children from age 2 and bulk bill eligible children aged 0 to 17 under the Child Dental Benefits Schedule. Call 13 13 16 or book online at coredental.com.au. You can also see our children's dentistry page.

A white spot can be early decay, and that changes everything

Pages about white marks tend to work through fluorosis, genetics and childhood illness. There is one more cause that belongs at the top of the list, because it is the only one where acting quickly changes the outcome.

The Victorian Department of Health, on tooth decay: "The first sign of tooth decay is a chalky white spot on the tooth. At this stage, the decay process can be reversed." Its decay page describes the same thing: "In its early stages it can appear as a white or dark spot on the tooth, but as more mineral is lost a cavity or hole may appear."

So a white spot is one of the recognised presentations of decay before there is a hole. And the Department is clear that this stage is not a one-way street: "Early tooth decay is reversible. Saliva can

deposit mineral back onto the tooth surface, and improvements in your diet and oral hygiene make a big difference." It adds what a clinician can do: "Your dentist can treat early areas of tooth decay with fluoride or other products to help with this process."

Which is why the advice is to have it looked at rather than watched. A white spot that is fluorosis is cosmetic and stable. A white spot that is early decay has a window in which it can remineralise, and that window closes as mineral continues to be lost: "Further mineral loss may lead to the cavity going into the centre of the tooth where the nerve is (the pulp), which may lead to a toothache."

Those two outcomes look identical to a parent and are straightforward to tell apart in a chair. The Department also notes why looking is not always enough on its own: "X-rays are often needed to diagnose decay as it can occur in areas not visible to the naked eye."

Where white spots of the decay kind tend to appear. The Department's dry mouth page describes the pattern when saliva is short: decay "along the gum line (tooth root surface)", and "people with dry mouth may also develop decay on the lower front teeth, which are normally well protected by saliva produced from beneath the tongue". Saliva is the reason some surfaces are usually spared, which is also why marks in unusual places are worth mentioning.

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Tooth decay, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 28 June 2025); Teeth and mouth care, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 25 July 2025); Dry mouth, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 9 September 2025). All accessed 6 November 2026.

Fluoride: the amounts that are recommended, so you can check

If the question behind a white mark is "has my child had too much fluoride", the useful answer is not reassurance. It is the published amount for their age, so you can compare it with what is happening at your basin.

The Department's three bands , verbatim:

"for children 0-18 months of age - use only water, no toothpaste"

"from 18 months until the child turns six years old - use a pea-sized amount of children's toothpaste that contains fluoride (children's toothpaste has a lower level of fluoride than standard toothpaste)"

"from six years of age - use a pea-sized amount of standard fluoride toothpaste"

Three things are being controlled there: whether there is fluoride at all, how strong it is, and how much goes on the brush. A pea-sized amount at every age past 18 months.

And the instruction that keeps fluoride out of the stomach. "After brushing, ask your child to spit out the toothpaste, and not to rinse with water. The small amount of toothpaste remaining keeps protecting teeth." The adult version adds the first half plainly: "spit out the fluoride toothpaste - do not swallow it".

Spit, do not swallow, do not rinse. Swallowing is the part worth supervising, which is also why the Department puts an adult in charge for longer than most people expect: "You will need to help your child brush their teeth until they can do it well enough by themselves (usually about eight years old)."

On flavour, which is often where over-use starts. "Fruit-flavoured toothpastes have become popular in recent years. Non-mint flavours are fine but always make sure toothpaste contains fluoride as this is the key ingredient that protects teeth against decay." Pleasant-tasting toothpaste is not discouraged — it just makes the spit-don't-swallow habit more worth watching.

Why fluoride is in there at all. "Fluoride protects the teeth against acid." On the water side, the National Health and Medical Research Council states that "in Australia, community water fluoridation programs are considered a safe and effective way of reducing tooth decay across the population", and that "community water fluoridation is the adjustment of fluoride in drinking water to reach a level that can help to reduce tooth decay". It also records that "NHMRC confirmed that community water fluoridation helps to reduce tooth decay, and that there is no reliable evidence that water fluoridation at current Australian levels causes health problems".

So the balance a parent is actually weighing. Fluoride at the published amount protects teeth against acid, and the published amount is specific enough to check. Where a child does not have fluoridated water, or has more risk of decay for other reasons, the Department sends the question to a clinician instead of giving a rule: "For children who do not have access to fluoridated water, or who have a greater risk of tooth decay for other reasons, ask your oral health professional about what kind of toothpaste is right for you."

And when to have the marks assessed. The Department's starting point for children is early: "Children should have their first dental check-up by 1 year of age. Ask your dental practitioner how often you should have a dental check-up." If a white mark has appeared on an adult tooth, that is a reason to use the next appointment rather than wait for the one after — because if it is early decay, the reversible stage is the one you are in now.

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Toothbrushing - children 0-6 years, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 4 August 2026); Teeth and mouth care, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 25 July 2025); Dental treatment, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 3 June 2026); Tooth decay, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 28 June 2025); National Health and Medical Research Council, Health effects of water fluoridation, nhmrc.gov.au . All accessed 6 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

Are white spots on my child's teeth always fluorosis?

No. Fluorosis is the most common cause, but white spots can also be early decay, an inherited enamel condition, or the result of illness or injury in early childhood. A dentist needs to examine the teeth to tell these apart.

Should I stop my child using fluoride toothpaste?

Please do not stop without advice. Fluoride helps protect teeth from decay. The aim is to use an amount and type that suits your child's age and to encourage them to spit rather than swallow. Ask your dentist what suits your child.

Do white spots need treatment?

Not always. If the spots are mild and not affecting health, some families choose to monitor them. If they bother your child, or if they are early decay, your dentist can discuss options such as preventive care, microabrasion or whitening.

Can white spots turn brown?

Yes. White spots are porous and can pick up colour from food and drink over time, becoming brown stains. They generally do not affect tooth health, but they can change how the teeth look.

When should I have the spots checked?

As soon as you notice them. Spots near the gum line can be early decay, which responds well to early preventive care. Regular check-ups also let your dentist monitor any changes.

Could a white spot be early decay rather than fluorosis?

Yes, and that is the main reason to have it looked at. The Victorian Department of Health: "The first sign of tooth decay is a chalky white spot on the tooth. At this stage, the decay process can be reversed." Fluorosis marks are cosmetic and stable; early decay has a window that closes.

If it is early decay, can it be reversed?

At that stage, yes. "Early tooth decay is reversible. Saliva can deposit mineral back onto the tooth surface, and improvements in your diet and oral hygiene make a big difference." A clinician can help too: "Your dentist can treat early areas of tooth decay with fluoride or other products to help with this process."

What happens if early decay is left?

Mineral keeps being lost. "Further mineral loss may lead to the cavity going into the centre of the tooth where the nerve is (the pulp), which may lead to a toothache."

Can a dentist tell by looking?

Often, though not always. The Department notes that "x-rays are often needed to diagnose decay as it can occur in areas not visible to the naked eye", and that "a tooth can appear intact from the outside" while decay shows on an image.

How much toothpaste should my child be using?

The Department's bands are: water only and no toothpaste for children 0-18 months; "a pea-sized amount of children's toothpaste that contains fluoride" from 18 months until they turn six; and "a pea-sized amount of standard fluoride toothpaste" from six years of age.

Should my child rinse after brushing?

No. "After brushing, ask your child to spit out the toothpaste, and not to rinse with water. The small amount of toothpaste remaining keeps protecting teeth." The part to supervise is the spitting rather than swallowing.

Until what age should I be brushing for my child?

Later than most people assume. "You will need to help your child brush their teeth until they can do it well enough by themselves (usually about eight years old)."

Should I switch to a non-fluoride toothpaste?

Nothing in the published advice supports that. Fluoride is described as "the key ingredient that protects teeth against decay", and it "protects the teeth against acid". If your water is not fluoridated, or your child has more risk of decay for other reasons, the Department's answer is to "ask your oral health professional about what kind of toothpaste is right for you".

Is fluoridated water a risk?

The National Health and Medical Research Council's position is that "in Australia, community water fluoridation programs are considered a safe and effective way of reducing tooth decay across the

population", and that it "confirmed that community water fluoridation helps to reduce tooth decay, and that there is no reliable evidence that water fluoridation at current Australian levels causes health problems".

When should the marks be checked?

The Department's starting point for children is "their first dental check-up by 1 year of age", and after that, "ask your dental practitioner how often you should have a dental check-up". A new white mark on an adult tooth is a reason to use the next appointment rather than the one after — if it is early decay, now is the reversible stage.

Related services and further reading

Children's dentistry

Paediatric dentistry

What is fluoride and what is it used for?

Top tips for children's dental hygiene

Sensitive teeth: 4 things to avoid

CDBS and bulk billing for children's dental care

Cracked tooth treatment

Composite and porcelain veneers

Teeth whitening

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.

Bulk billing for eligible children under the Child Dental Benefits Schedule, interest-free payment plans and 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 mornings, 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.

What is dental fluorosis?

Dental fluorosis is a change in tooth enamel that can develop when a child takes in too much fluoride while their adult teeth are forming, typically in the first three years of life. Mild cases show as faint white spots or lines.

What other conditions cause white marks on adult teeth?

White marks can also come from early decay near the gum line, inherited enamel conditions, or illness or injury in the first two years of life. Core Dental dentists examine each tooth to find the likely cause.

Can white spots near the gum line become cavities?

Yes. White spots near the gum line can be early decay. They are porous and can progress to cavities if untreated, so we encourage a prompt check at Core Dental, where preventive care can often halt early decay.

How can white spots on teeth be treated?

Depending on cause and severity, Core Dental dentists may discuss preventive care, microabrasion, whitening, or composite veneers, which can later be replaced by porcelain veneers after age 16. Results vary between individuals.

Does Core Dental see children?

Yes. Our dentists welcome children from age 2 at our nine clinics, and we bulk bill eligible children aged 0 to 17 under the Child Dental Benefits Schedule. Call 13 13 16 to check eligibility.

Why do white spots become brown over time?

White spots are porous, so they can absorb colour from foods and drinks and darken gradually. They generally do not harm the health of the tooth, but your Core Dental dentist can discuss options if you dislike the appearance.

How do I book a children's dental check-up at Core Dental?

Call 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 can arrange a time at your nearest clinic.