Tooth brushing, one of the newest classroom routines, is critically important for children. Along with the other elements of good oral hygiene, tooth brushing can lead to healthier lives for young children.

Tooth brushing should be a part of classroom routines after meals, or at least once during the school day in full-day programs. At the same time, this routine provides many opportunities for language and literacy development. The educator should describe the items used in the routine (brush, toothpaste, rinse cup, etc.) and verbalize each step of the tooth brushing routine. Songs and artwork are natural extensions of tooth brushing routines, but connections with many other curriculum areas can easily be integrated into the routine.

**Four Steps to Proper Tooth Brushing**

**Step 1** Wet toothbrush.

**Step 2** Apply toothpaste – a fluoride paste, pea size.

**Step 3** Brush, holding the toothbrush at a 45 degree angle, using back and forth short strokes, then up and down. Remember to brush both the front and back of the teeth and tongue also. Brush for about 2 minutes.

**Step 4** Rinse mouth.

**Proper Storage of Toothbrushes**

The storage of toothbrushes is also an important concern. Storage should be designed to minimize the spread of germs. Toothbrushes should be stored in such a way that there is adequate space (at least 2") between brushes, and the brushes should be able to air dry. Brush heads should never touch or drip on one another during storage. Each child should have an individual, child-sized, soft-bristle brush that is labeled using a permanent marker with the child's name (or an identifying symbol for young non-readers). Toothpaste should include fluoride, and each child needs only a pea-sized dab of toothpaste for each
brushing. Brushes should be replaced every 3-4 months or when bristles start to look worn.

Additional Information
Head Start Programs have been among the leaders in making tooth brushing routines an important part of the curriculum and have well-defined instructions for tooth brushing in Head Start classrooms. Classroom activities, tooth brushing instruction, classroom tips, proper toothbrush storage, and integrated classroom activities (music, art, story time, etc.) can be found at the American Dental Association website. To access these guides, go to www.ada.org/index.asp and click on “Students & Teachers” and then “U.S. Department of Health & Human Services / Head Start Dental Health Curriculum.”