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## ANTIBIOTIC USE LINKED TO POOR TOOTH DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN

Thanksgiving is a time to give thanks for all of the good things in life. However, November also marks the start of the flu season. According to a recent study, the average child will probably catch six to eight colds this year — maybe more if brothers and sisters are around sharing their germs.

Consequently, doctors write millions of antibiotic prescriptions for colds and flu every year, often under pressure from worried parents. If a child has a complication from a cold or flu that might involve bacteria — such as an ear infection or sinus infection—antibiotics are necessary. Antibiotics are also appropriate to treat bacterial infections in the mouth. However, antibiotics do only one thing: kill bacteria. No antibiotic — from Amoxicillin™ to Zithromax™ — will help cure a cold or flu since both are caused by viruses. Viruses are a class of germs different from bacteria.

You might think that taking antibiotics can't hurt, even if they don't help with a cold or flu. Not so, especially with children. Not only are antibiotics useless against a cold or flu, they can actually interfere with the complete development of tooth enamel according to a longitudinal study recently released. In the October issue of *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, researchers highlighted the need to be cautious about the use of antibiotics, especially with infants. The impact is called enamel hypoplasia, or dental fluorosis.

### What is enamel hypoplasia?

Enamel hypoplasia is a broad term to describe abnormal tooth enamel (the hard, visible part of a tooth), especially when it has surface defects and irregularities. Enamel hypoplasia may be due to nutritional deficiencies while in the womb and after birth, allergies, infections, medications, trauma, rubella, and many other medical problems. Enamel hypoplasia is the contemporary term used to describe general abnormal tooth enamel.

### What is dental fluorosis?

Dental fluorosis is the incomplete development of tooth enamel caused by high doses of fluoride. However, dental fluorosis is also an old term still used by some dentists to describe enamel defects that are caused by factors other than too much fluoride.

In the end, the recent study may do nothing more than underline the increasing trend to limit the use of antibiotics among children. Thankfully, if your child has been diagnosed with enamel hypoplasia and/or fluorosis, she can be cavity free with good oral hygiene, a proper diet, and regular visits to your pediatric dentist.

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This article first appeared in the November 2005 issue of *West Coast Magazine*