



Children's Oral Health National Facts

Caries: Tooth decay (dental caries) is **the single most common chronic disease of childhood** – five to eight times **more common than asthma**. 80% of tooth decay is found in 25% of children. Asian and Pacific Islanders suffer the most tooth decay, followed by Hispanics, African-Americans and white children.

Consequences: Oral diseases and conditions can be consequential to growth, function, ability to attend to learning, self-image, and employability. The most frequent symptom of dental pathology is pain which can distract children from learning and playing, and limit their ability to eat and speak. Extensive early childhood caries has been shown to inhibit attainment of normal weight and height in toddlers. **Dental and oral diseases are increasingly understood to compromise general health and function.**

Dental Insurance: There are 2.6 children lacking dental coverage for every child lacking health coverage. A child in Medicaid is 4 times more likely to have a medical visit than a dental visit. Fewer than one-in-five children in Medicaid obtain dental care in a year.

Use of Services: 5% of children have the greatest dental needs and account for 30% of Medicaid expenditures. 15% of children have significant disease and account for 45% of Medicaid dental expenditures. 80% of children have modest needs and account for only 25% of expenditures.

Dental spending: In most states **less than one half of one percent of Medicaid spending** goes to children's dental care. In contrast, 25% of all children's health spending in the US overall is for oral health care.

Unmet Needs: Among children reported by their parents to have one or more unmet healthcare needs, three times more children have unmet needs for dental care than medical care.

Dental visits: **Dental visits increase** with increasing income and parental education. **Low-income children** who suffer from the most dental disease **have the least access to care**, despite publicly financed dental coverage. Children of color are less likely to see a dentist in a year than white children (29% vs. 49%).

Dentist workforce: The **number of dental school graduates has declined** significantly over the past 15 years; the entering 1st year class of students has been reduced by nearly 40% between 1986 and 2000. The dental profession is much less racially and ethnically diverse than the US population with only about 10% of dental students being under-represented minorities.

Shortage Areas: DHHS has identified **1,700 dental health professional shortage areas**; the population in these areas is over 25,000,000. The percentage of underrepresented minorities in the profession is remarkably low compared to their proportions in the overall population. [34.4 million/5000 dentists needed to serve those sites]

Dental Safety Net: The dental "**safety net**," comprised of dental schools, community-based clinics, school-based programs, hospital clinics, and mobile vans, **are few in number** compared to the medical safety net.