

FACT SHEET: CHILDREN & YOUTH

WHAT ARE THE GREATEST ISSUES IN CHILDREN'S ORAL HEALTH?

Tooth decay is the number one health issue of our nation's children. Approximately 23% or 1 in 5 of children ages two to five years have dental caries in primary teeth.ⁱ

More than a quarter of children age 18 and under are at higher risk for tooth decay with more than 68 percent ages six to nine not receiving dental sealants.ⁱⁱ

Disparities in oral health exist:

1. Hispanic and non-Hispanic black children are two times more likely to have tooth decay compared to non-Hispanic white children (ages 2-8).
2. 27% of Hispanic children have any dental caries compared with only 18% of non-Hispanic white and Asian children (ages 6-11).
3. Dental sealants are more prevalent for non-Hispanic white children (44%) compared with non-Hispanic black and Asian children (31% each) ages six to eleven.ⁱⁱ

CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program) is the only insurance that guarantees children a dental health benefit, however, accessing oral health care is not easy for every child.

Many families experience numerous barriers including: difficulty finding a dental provider that accepts CHIP, Medicaid or provides free care, inability to pay for services and trouble securing transportation.

WHY IS GOOD ORAL HEALTH IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN?

Untreated tooth decay can cause pain that may lead to difficulty eating, sleeping, and concentrating in school, leading to poor school attendance and academic performance.

HOW CAN SCHOOLS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Because schools are an ideal place to reach children, they can play a pivotal role in impacting health.

School-based dental sealant programs are an evidence-based public health best practice approach for preventing tooth decay among children, especially those at highest risk.^{iii,iv}

School-based sealant programs have been associated with reducing the incidence of tooth decay by 40 to 60 percent.^{iii,iv}

Dental sealants are thin plastic coatings that are applied to the chewing surfaces of back teeth to protect them from tooth decay.^v

WHAT'S THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SCHOOL NUTRITION & ORAL HEALTH?

The Child Nutrition Reauthorization Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act passed in 2010 allowing the USDA, for the first time in 30 years, to update nutritional standards for lunch, snacks, and beverages sold at schools.^{vi} However, the bill expired in 2015 and is up for reauthorization in 2016.

With over 90 percent of schools meeting updated lunch standards, students across the country are experiencing a healthier school environment with more nutritious options.^{vii}



CAMPAIGN FOR ORAL HEALTH EQUITY PROMOTING ORAL HEALTH ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

The new meals are providing children more whole grains, fruits and vegetables, lean protein and low-fat dairy, as well as less sugar, fat, and sodium. ^{vii}

As a result, kids are eating more fruits and vegetables. Under the updated standards, kids are now eating 16 percent more vegetables and 23 percent more fruit at lunch. ^{vii}

Nutritious lunches benefit tooth health because of dairy foods high in calcium and protein-rich foods like meat, poultry, fish, milk and eggs high in phosphorus. Both of these minerals play a critical role in dental health, by protecting and rebuilding tooth enamel. ^{viii}

Fruits and vegetables are high in water and fiber which can help balance the harmful effects of sugar and acid on teeth. ^{viii}

HOW CAN YOU MAKE AN IMPACT?

Support Oral Health America by raising awareness about the important role schools can play in helping children and youth maintain good oral health.

Please join Oral Health America as we strive to impact the lives of America's children. Together, we can make a difference. To get involved, please visit oralhealthamerica.org/kids

ⁱ Dye BA, Thornton-Evans G, Li X, Iafolla TJ. Dental caries and sealant prevalence in children and adolescents in the United States, 2011–2012. NCHS data brief, no 191. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2015.

ⁱⁱ Delta Dental. The Preventive Dental Care Study. 2016. Retrieved from: deltadental.com/pdcstudy

ⁱⁱⁱ Guide to Community Preventive Services. Preventing dental caries: school-based dental sealant delivery programs 2013.

^{iv} PEW Center on the States. Falling Short Most States Lag on Dental Sealants. The Pew Charitable Trusts; 2013.

^v Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Division of Oral Health. 2013.

^{vi} Center for Science in the Public Interest. Support Healthier Snacks and Beverages in School. 2014.

^{vii} United States Department of Agriculture. Fact Sheet: Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act School Meals Implementation. 2014.

^{viii} Mouth Healthy. Nutrition: The Basics. American Dental Association. 2016.