

Children's Dental Disease - Fact Sheet

Too many children suffer from dental disease

- Dental disease is the single most common chronic childhood disease — **five** times more common than asthma and **seven** times more common than hay fever.ⁱ
- Dental disease is so widespread and the health effects so significant that the U.S. Surgeon General has classified dental disease as a silent epidemicⁱⁱ
- The most recent national survey shows that the rate of dental disease among children is increasing. Among children age two to five years, dental disease increased from 24 to 28 percent between 1988-1994 and 1999-2004.ⁱⁱⁱ
- In Washington the rate of dental decay among preschoolers is higher than the rate nationally. A 2005 survey showed that 45 percent of low-income preschoolers in Washington had dental decay compared to 28 percent of preschoolers nationally.^{iv}
- The rate of decay among preschoolers in Washington has increased over the last 10 years. In 2004, 45 percent of low-income preschoolers had dental decay compared to 38.3 percent in 1994.^v

Dental disease prevention needs to begin at an early age

- Less than one-third of children from birth through age 5 enrolled in Washington's Medical Assistance program visited a dentist in 2005.^{vi}
- Statewide, it is estimated that less than one percent of children under age three receive dental disease prevention services during well child visits.^{vii, viii} On average, children visit a physician **8 times** for well-child checkups before age three.

The consequences and costs of dental disease are significant

- Poor oral health of children has been related to poor performance in school, poor social relationships and less success in later life. If children are in pain, it distracts them from concentrating on schoolwork. Low- and moderate-income children miss a disproportionate amount of school due to dental disease.^{ix}
- Children with severe dental decay often need to be treated in a hospital operating room, costing about **\$5,000 to \$7,000** per child.^x
- In 2007, the state Medicaid program spent more than \$40 million treating children for dental disease.^{xi}
- Poor oral health has been linked to diabetes, heart disease and other long-term health problems.^{xii}

Sources:

ⁱ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General*. 2000.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Washington State Department of Health, *Washington State Smile Survey 2005* (Olympia: Office of Maternal and Child Health, 2006); and NCHS *Trends in Oral Health Status*, 5.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Washington State Medical Assistance Administration, Department of Social and Health Services, *Dental Services Utilization Report, Fiscal Year 2005*.

^{vii} Washington Dental Service claims experience review, March 2007.

^{viii} Washington State Medical Assistance Administration, Department of Social and Health Services, *Fluoride varnish applications by primary care providers, fiscal year 2005*.

^{ix} National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, as cited in US General Accounting Offices, *Oral Health: Dental Disease is a Chronic Problem Among Low-Income Populations*. HEHS-00-72. April 2000.

^x Joel Berg, Director of Dentistry, Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center, personal communication, June 2008.

^{xi} Washington State Health and Recovery Services Administration, *Dental Services Utilization Data, Fiscal Years 1997-2007*, Olympia: Washington State Dept of Social and Health Services.

^{xii} U.S. DHHS *Oral Health in America*.