

NJ Children's Oral Health

Protecting a Child's Smile Helps Ensure Healthy Growth!



February 2014

Every child deserves a healthy start, part of which is adequate medical care. Preventive dental care is an essential part of good healthcare, just as important as immunizations and wellness visits. Dental disease can harm a child's overall well-being and has been linked to illnesses such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and strokes.

The pain and other complications from tooth decay can cause children to miss school and fall behind in their studies. And when children are home sick, their parents miss work. Later in life, unhealthy teeth can also hinder a person's ability to find employment.

In fact, tooth decay or "dental caries" is the leading chronic childhood disease in the United States, much more common than asthma or hay fever. And it is mostly preventable.

Early Dental Care Critical

The American Dental Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend that all children see a dentist by their first birthday and then at six month intervals. Some private health insurance plans include dental coverage. New Jersey's public health insurance program, NJ FamilyCare, which includes Medicaid, provides this coverage. Despite this, low-income parents often have difficulty finding dentists who accept Medicaid. These children often do not receive preventative care and end up using emergency care. This equates to a lack of access to dental care.

Children Enrolled in NJ FamilyCare/Medicaid Who Received Preventative Dental Care, Ages 1-18			
	2010	2012	% Change 2010-12
Number of Children, Ages 1-18	237,939	294,101	24
Percentage of Eligible Children, Ages 1-18	41	45	11

Source: As reported by the annual EPSDT Participation Report, Form CMS-416, US Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, for each year.

A June 2013 report by the Pew Center on the States found that more than half – 51 percent -- of New Jersey children covered by Medicaid received no dental services in 2011.

The New Jersey Division of Medical Assistance and Health Services (Medicaid) is working to address this issue and has made progress in providing more children with access to dental care. The state Medicaid program now permits its contracted managed care organizations to reimburse trained medical providers, including nurses and nurse practitioners, for oral health screening and fluoride varnish application.



Data included in Advocates for Children of New Jersey's **2013 NJ Kids Count** reports show an encouraging 59 percent increase in the number of children covered by NJ FamilyCare receiving any dental service from 2008 to 2011 and a 69 percent increase in the number of children receiving preventive care. This is good news, but still only 45 percent of eligible children, ages 1-18 received preventative dental services in 2012.

Minority children are less likely to receive dental care. According to a 2011 report from Rutgers Center for State Health Policy "minority and low-income children have been reported to be less likely to see a dentist than their counterparts." About 38 percent of Hispanic children did not have a dental visit in 2009, the report said. Non-Hispanic black children were also less likely than white children to have a dental visit, with 28 percent receiving no dental care in 2009, compared to 14 percent of white children.

New Jersey Dentists, Physicians, and Community Organizations Take Action

Dentists, physicians, state government, community organizations, managed care organizations and advocates have joined forces to address this issue on several fronts.

With funding from the DentaQuest Foundation, the New Jersey Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics (NJAAP) began an oral health initiative called **Linking Preventive Oral Health and Primary Care** through which New Jersey dentists are training pediatricians to provide preventive oral health screens and apply fluoride varnish to infants and toddlers.

Giving Every Child A Chance

Pediatricians then connect parents to a local dentist who can meet the child's ongoing dental needs. A pilot, which began in Monmouth County, is expected to expand to neighboring counties this year. The Delta Dental Foundation is also contributing its expertise and a grant to support this effort.

NJAAP is seeking dental champions throughout the state and working with other organizations, including the New Jersey Dental Association, the state's Medicaid office, Medicaid managed care organizations, the Center for Health Care Strategies and ACNJ to improve oral health outcomes for children. For more information about the work of the initiative, contact Juliana David at (609) 842-0014 or juliana.david@aapnj.org.

The NJ Oral Health Coalition's Conference

The Affordable Care Act and Dentistry:

What it means for You

Wednesday, February 26, 2014

See ACNJ website at www.acnj.org for details.

The New Jersey Oral Health coalition is focused on improving oral health outcomes of all New Jersey residents. Through both private and public partnerships, members of the Coalition work to ensure that all residents of our state have access to quality oral health care services, both dental treatment and dental disease prevention programs. Currently, efforts are underway to help the state streamline credentialing of dental providers.

Give Kids a Smile

The New Jersey Dental Association continues to sponsor its annual *Give Kids a Smile NJ* day.



ADA American Dental Association

Each February, New Jersey's dental community comes together to ensure the delivery of care to thousands of children under age 13 who otherwise may not be able to afford or access oral healthcare.

Volunteers provide oral hygiene instruction, screenings, cleanings, x-rays, fillings, extractions, fluoride treatments, stainless steel crowns and much more. They work to ensure the program is fun and educational and that it gives many children a great first impression of visits to the dentists. Under the direction of the New Jersey Dental Association and in conjunction with the American Dental Association, *Give Kids a Smile NJ* has grown to be the largest, single-day program of its kind in the state. For more information, visit the New Jersey Dental Association's website at www.njda.org.

Community Water Fluoridation

Nearly all naturally occurring water sources contain fluoride—a mineral that has been proven to prevent, and even reverse, tooth decay. Water fluoridation prevents tooth decay mainly by providing teeth with frequent contact with low levels of fluoride throughout each day and throughout life.

Even today, with other available sources of fluoride, studies show that water fluoridation reduces tooth decay by about 25 percent over a person's lifetime. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), **New Jersey ranks 49th out of 50 states in its percentage of population that drinks fluoridated public water at the CDC's recommended therapeutic level of .7 part per million.** Most of New Jersey's largest cities, including Camden, Newark, Jersey City and Paterson, do not fluoridate their water at the recommended levels.

For more information about community water fluoridation, visit, www.likemyteeth.org, www.cdc.gov/fluoridation/ and www.njda.org.

For more information contact Mary Coogan at mcoogan@acnj.org.

More Resources

To find a dentist, parents whose children have health insurance should contact their insurance company or HMO.

ACNJ developed a resource list of videos, print and other materials to help educate children and their families about the importance of preventive oral health and good oral health habits. ACNJ also has updated county lists for the *NJ Smiles Directory*, which includes dentists who treat young children. Contact Mary Coogan at ACNJ, mcoogan@acnj.org, for details.

Dr. Sam Wakim, dental director at the Zufall Health Center in Dover and a member of the NJAAP's Oral Health Stakeholders Group, has also developed a dental resource list. The materials included on the resource list were rated by cost, content, and readability. To access this resource list, visit www.zufallhealth.org.

New Jersey has public dental clinics, which are primarily provided by local health departments, hospitals and Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). People who have difficulty accessing appropriate dental care due to insurance or financial constraints should visit the state Department of Health's website at www.nj.gov/health, to find a clinic near them. Many of the clinics have financial and/or residency requirements, so please call for an appointment and ask about required documentation regarding income or residency.