

Oral Health of Arizona Preschool Children Remains Below National Recommendations

Summary of Findings

The Arizona Department of Health Services, Office of Oral Health's (OOH) survey of preschool children shows that the oral health of Arizona preschoolers is well below national recommendations. Oral disease is nearly 100 percent preventable and this new information will help determine what resources are needed and where best to place them to improve the oral health of children statewide.

Arizona preschool children have a significant burden of oral disease and it starts early with 7% of children ages birth through age one having the first signs of tooth decay. By the time children reach the ages of 2 through 4, 37% have had tooth decay and 30% have untreated tooth decay. These levels are far beyond the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Healthy People 2010 targets of 11% having ever had tooth decay and 9% having untreated tooth decay.

Data further show that race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status may be factors in oral health. Over 43% of Asian/Pacific Islander children ages 2-4 have untreated tooth decay. Thirty-four percent of Hispanic children have untreated tooth decay with similar rates found in Black (32%) and Native American (31%) children. Children who come from families where parents/guardians a high school education or less are much more likely to have untreated tooth decay (42%) than children who come from families with parents/guardians who have more than a high school education (24%).

Dental insurance status was not significantly related to whether a child had untreated tooth decay. Twenty-seven percent of children who have private dental insurance have untreated tooth decay; similar rates are found among children with public dental insurance (32%) and children who have no dental insurance (30%).

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children be seen by a dentist within 6 months of the first tooth erupting or by 1 year of age, whichever comes first. Only 6% of children ages birth to one had seen a dentist, according to parents' reports. In addition, older children are not getting needed dental care; more than half (54%) of parents/guardians responded that their preschool children age 3 had never visited a dentist.

These results indicate that tooth decay clearly remains a problem for young children in Arizona. Although preventive measures, such as fluorides have been widely available for years, efforts need to focus on reaching underserved children who stand to benefit the most. These findings challenge us to strengthen disease prevention programs and to implement strategies that lead to treatment access for specific populations. The direction of OOH is to address this and other oral

health issues by setting goals and providing specific, measurable and time-phased objectives and activities for accomplishing them.

Methods: Preschool children received oral health screenings at 100 randomly selected licensed child care centers with classroom sizes of ten pupils or more. The screenings of 989 children were completed during the fall of 2008 through the spring of 2009. The survey involved a standardized cross-sectional, open-mouth screening developed by the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors and conducted by trained dental staff.

Key Findings:

- Tooth decay starts early in childhood; 7% of children ages birth through age have the first signs of tooth decay.
- Children ages 2 through 4 have tooth decay rates far beyond national recommendations; 37% have tooth decay experience and 30% have untreated tooth decay.
- Disparities exist for children who come from families where parents/guardians have a high school education or less. They are significantly more likely to have untreated tooth decay (42%) than children who come from families with parents/guardians who have more than a high school education (24%).
- Children are not getting needed dental visits; 54% of children age 3 had never visited a dentist.

To view the detailed factsheets, please visit: <http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/owch/ooh/index.htm>