



Children's Oral Health in California

BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW

Improving access to oral health is a necessary and critical step to improving overall oral health and reducing oral health disparities.¹

Early childhood caries (ECC) can result in severe pain, malocclusion, malnutrition, and low self-esteem.²

Oral health disparities, also known as oral health inequities, are especially noted in children from minority backgrounds and from low socio-economic backgrounds. These same racial and ethnic disparities exist in California. In addition to recent data suggesting citizenship status may also be a factor. Adolescent immigrants in California were half as less likely to access dental care in California compared to their citizen counterparts.³

DISPARITIES

The greatest racial and ethnic disparity among children aged 2–4 years and aged 6–8 years is seen in Mexican American and black, non-Hispanic children. Non-white, non-Asians have poorer oral health amongst racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. Furthermore, across the U.S., Mexican American children and Spanish-speaking children ages 2-4 and 6-8 years old have much higher tooth decay rates.⁴ More than 75% of dental cavities occur in 8% of U.S. children 2-5 years old.⁵

Oral health disparities amongst U.S. children:

- Low socioeconomic status = high caries risk.
- Maternal prenatal smoking.
- Disabilities and complex medical conditions.
- Local disparities.⁶

The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) reports children aged 2-5 years are the only age group with increasing rates of dental disease, with 28% of

children experiencing dental caries. Local disparities can also exist. For instance, in San Francisco, a study identified Asian children living in 2 zip codes as having significantly higher dental caries experience than other children in the public school system.⁷

OTHER STATISTICS ON CALIFORNIA'S CHILDREN

- 9,307,653 children live in California
- 2,600,068 are White, non-Hispanic
- 571,821 are Black
- 4,715,912 are Hispanic
- 1,032,398 are Asian/Pacific Islander
- 74,932 are American Indian/Alaska Native
- 665,643 are two or more races
- 73% of California's children are racial/ethnic minorities
- 22% of California's children are living in poverty, with more than 9% living in extreme poverty.⁸

"Fewer than half of California's pediatric dentists participate in Medi-Cal – and among participating dentists, two-thirds limit the number of Medi-Cal patients they see."⁹

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RESOURCES

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LEGISLATIVE AND EXECUTIVE RESOURCE HANDBOOK



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