



CHILDREN AREN'T HEALTHY WITHOUT GOOD ORAL HEALTH!

FACTS ABOUT THE ORAL HEALTH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE'S CHILDREN

Children's Oral Health Is Critical To Their Overall Health

The Surgeon General has reported that oral health is a critical health issue for our nation's children, one that is largely unmet. And it is an unmet need of significant proportions.

- ❖ Oral disease – tooth decay – is the most prevalent chronic childhood disease, affecting half of all first graders and nearly 80% of 17 year olds. It is five times as common as childhood asthma.ⁱ
- ❖ In New Hampshire, over half of our third graders have experienced tooth decay – a bacterial infection of the mouth – and for approximately one quarter of these children, this decay remains untreated.ⁱⁱ

We know that the health of children's mouths is as important as any other part of their bodies, and affects how well they feel, function and behave. Equally important, children's oral health will affect how they will develop into adulthood.

- ❖ Untreated tooth decay can lead to pain, inadequate nutrition, speech problems and learning problems.ⁱⁱⁱ
- ❖ Nationally, over 51 million hours of school are lost each year due to dental problems.^{iv}
- ❖ Scientists now believe that oral diseases are linked to chronic adult health problems such as heart and respiratory diseases.^v

Solutions Exist

We have the technology and the resources to protect our children from most tooth decay and oral disease:

- ❖ Prevention programs for children, including dental hygiene, oral health education, fluoride supplements and sealants, cost about half of what later treatment for tooth decay would cost.^{vi}
- ❖ Children who have regular dental visits and receive dental sealants (plastic coatings that seal the pits and grooves of molar teeth) have only one fourth as much tooth decay as those without.^{vii}
- ❖ Fluoridation of the water supply has been shown to reduce cavities in young people by about 26%.^{viii}
- ❖ Community water fluoridation is safe and effective and less expensive per person than the cost of a single filling. Nationally the average per capita cost of water fluoridation is 51 cents per year. Even over the course of a lifetime, this cost is less than the cost of placing one filling.^{ix}
- ❖ Children with dental insurance are much more likely to have timely visits to a dentist.^x

New Hampshire's Oral Health Infrastructure Is Inadequate

- ❖ Fewer than half of New Hampshire's residents who are served by municipal water supplies benefit from fluoridation. Our Healthy New Hampshire 2010 target is 65%.^{xi}
- ❖ Over one-fourth of New Hampshire's children lack dental insurance.^{xii}
- ❖ Nearly one in four NH residents lives in areas of the state that have been designated as Dental Health Provider Shortage Areas (DHPSAs). If the number of new dentists graduating from dental schools does not keep pace with the number of dentists retiring, it is likely that this problem will increase.^{xiii}

We Can Do Better

- ❖ We can prevent oral diseases by providing access to fluoride (through supplements and water fluoridation), dental sealants, and routine dental visits for our children.
- ❖ We can continue to prioritize children's health by maintaining support for New Hampshire Healthy Kids and Medicaid.
- ❖ We can improve access to oral health care by coordinating education, screening and treatment services among physicians, dentists and social service providers.
- ❖ We can remove unhealthy snacks and drinks from our schools.

Visit the Watch Your Mouth website at www.watchyourmouth.org, or call us at 1-866-WYMOUTH (1-866-996-6884) for more information.

References

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- ^v American Heart Association; <http://circ.ahajournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/111/5/576>; American Academy of Periodontology; www.perio.org/consumer/mbc.heart.htm; American Academy of Periodontology; www.perio.org/consumer/mbc.heart.htm
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- ^{xi} New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health Services, Bureau of Community Health Services, Rural Health and Primary Care Unit, Oral Health Program; Concord, NH. New Hampshire Oral Health Data, 2003. Page 26.
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