

General Information

Background¹

Oral health is an essential and integral component of general health. Poor oral health and untreated oral diseases and conditions can have a significant impact on quality of life. Dental insurance is associated with increased use of dental services and improved oral health status.

Dental caries is the single most common chronic disease of childhood, occurring five times as frequently as asthma and seven times more often than hay fever. Dental caries are the second most common chronic disease in children.

Despite the reduction in cases of caries in recent years, more than half of all children have caries by the second grade and, by the time students finish high school, about 78% have caries.

Risk Factors

Sugars and starches increase the risk of tooth decay. Sticky foods are more harmful than non-sticky foods because they remain on the surface of the teeth. Frequent snacking increases the time that acids are in contact with the surface of the tooth.

Prevention

The following preventive measures can reduce the risk of cavities and dental caries:

- Oral hygiene including brushing at least twice a day, flossing daily, and regular professional cleaning.
- Dental sealants
- Fluoride—It has been demonstrated that people who ingest fluoride in their drinking water or by fluoride supplements have fewer dental caries. Topical fluoride is also recommended to protect the surface of the teeth. This may include a fluoride toothpaste or mouthwash.

Size

2003 San Diego County

Dental Insurance³

- 60.5% of adults reported they currently had dental insurance and 73.7% of parents of children under age 19 reported their children currently had dental insurance.
- The lowest rates of dental insurance coverage were reported for:
 - Persons with less than a high school education, 28%.
 - Households with annual household incomes under \$20,000, 32%.
 - Hispanics, 47%.
 - Persons living in the Central and South regions, 53% and 56%, respectively.

Currently Have a Dental Care Provider³

- 74.5% of adults and 75.1% of children had a regular dental care provider.
- The lowest rates of those not having a dental care provider were reported for:
 - Persons living in the Central region, 68% among adults and 67% among children.
 - Hispanic adults, 60%, African American children, 67%, African American adults, 69%, and Hispanic children, 70%.
 - Persons with less than a high school education, 45%.
 - Persons with annual household incomes under \$20,000, 51%.

Dental Care Services³

- 74.2% of adults needed dental care services in the previous 12 months. Among these individuals, 72.2% indicated they received all needed care and 80.4% were satisfied or very satisfied with care received. The main reason for needing care was cleaning and regular check-up, 78.4%.
- 76.3% of children under age 18 received dental care. Among these, 92.7% received cleaning and regular check-ups, 36% received treatment for dental caries, 25% received fluoride treatment, 21.3% required braces and 19.9% received sealants.
- 9.8% of children who did not receive dental care had no dental insurance and 10.9% could not afford dental care services.

Size (continued)

How Well Dental Care Needs are Met³

The lowest rates of those who received all needed dental care include:

- Persons with no dental insurance—32%
- Persons with less than a high school education—46%
- Persons living in the Central region—63%
- Hispanics and African Americans—59%
- Households with annual incomes under \$40,000—55.1%

California⁴

During 2001, an estimated 62.4% of Californians aged 18 and over had dental insurance coverage.

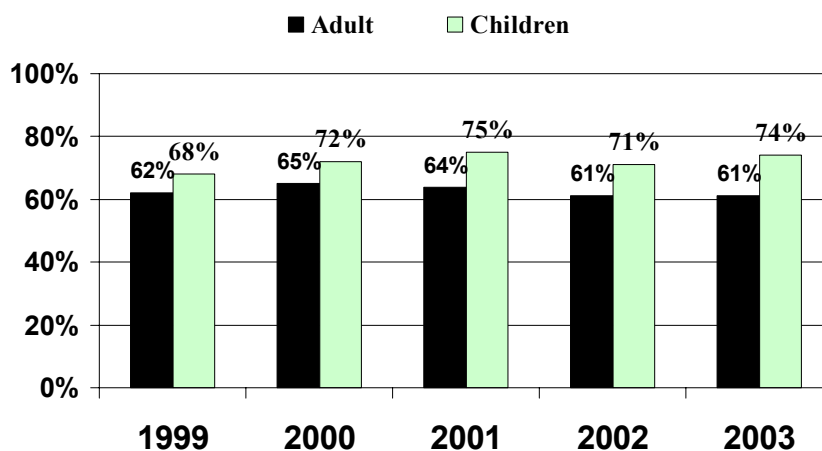
National⁵

It is estimated that in 2002, 108 million Americans lacked dental insurance and only 60% of baby boomers received dental insurance through their employers.

Most older workers lose their dental insurance at retirement.

Objective Healthy People 2010: There are 18 objectives related to dental health with the overall goal of preventing and controlling oral and craniofacial diseases, conditions, and injuries and improving access to related services.⁶

Dental Insurance Coverage
San Diego County 2000 - 2003³



Seriousness

In 2003 in San Diego County, 21.3% of parents indicated their children had missed school due to treatment for a cavity or emergency dental care for pain or injury.³

From 1999 to 2000, children in the U.S. with the highest percentages of untreated dental caries include:⁷

Ages 2 to 5 years

- Low income — 44.6%
- Hispanics — 35%
- African Americans — 25%

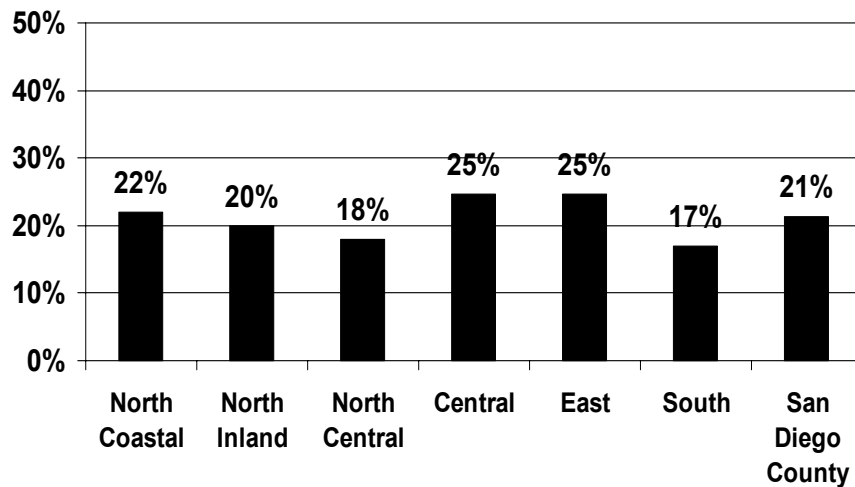
Ages 6 to 17 years

- Hispanics — 38%
- Low income — 33.8%
- African Americans — 27.9%

Individuals in families living below the poverty level experience more dental decay than those who are economically better off. Furthermore, the caries seen in these individuals is more likely to be untreated than caries in those living above the poverty level.¹

Adult non-Hispanic African Americans and Mexican Americans have higher proportions of untreated decayed teeth than their non-Hispanic white counterparts.¹

Missed School Because of Dental Problems
San Diego County - 2003¹



Community Concern*

Focus Group Discussion Points

Focus group participants recognized the need for maintaining good oral and dental health. Participants in the uninsured group expressed concern over the cost of dental care and Hispanics pointed out that many insurance companies do not include dental care in their coverage, a concern also mentioned by young adults and those with insurance. Adults expressed particular concern about the lack of options in terms of availability of insurance and providers.

Key Informant Scoring

Key informants scored oral and dental health as tenth most important out of 14 health issues presented overall and fourth most important for children from birth to age 14.

*Please note that focus groups and key informant surveys are qualitative in nature and findings presented may not be representative of a larger population.

References

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