

Improving Dental Access for Parents Benefits Their Children

Washington is a national leader in access to dental care for children. However, additional strategies are needed to reach the families who have not yet accessed available dental services.



Improving parents' access to dental care is an important strategy that can improve oral health for the entire family. When parents have access to dental services for themselves, they:

- Gain knowledge about the importance of oral health
- Understand the value of a dental visit for preventive care
- Learn how to prevent oral disease at home

Parents can pass this information on to their children. As important is the impact on parents' value for oral health care. Research has found that the value that parents place upon oral health plays an important role in determining whether they access available dental services for their children.^{i,ii}

Good news! We can influence parents' oral health values by providing them with access to dental services. Research has found that when parents go to the dentist, they are more likely to ensure that their children go to the dentist.

- Low-income parents who have preventive dental visits are **5 times** more likely to take their children for dental visits compared to parents who have never been to a dentist or seek dental care only when they have a problem.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Young, Medicaid-insured children of color in Washington are more likely to get dental care when their mothers have a regular source of dental care.^{iv}
- Nationally, 86% of children whose parents had a dental visit in the previous year also had a dental visit, compared to 63% of children whose parents did not have a dental visit.^v

Children's Oral Health: Significant Progress, More Work Remains:

- About half of Medicaid-insured children visited the dentist in FY2011. This rate has doubled since FY1995, when only about one-quarter visited the dentist. However, dental visits lag when compared to medical visits – about two-thirds of Medicaid-insured children received at least one recommended medical screening in FY2011.
- Fewer children are suffering from untreated tooth decay. From 2005 to 2010, the rate of untreated decay among low-income preschoolers was cut in half (26% to 13%).
- More needs to be done to prevent tooth decay. 40% of low-income preschoolers and 68% of low-income third graders have experienced tooth decay.

Expanding Access to Dental Care for Washington's Kids:

Access to Baby and Child Dentistry Programs which operates in every county in the state, connects Medicaid-insured children to dentists and provides education to their families.

Apple Health for Kids provides dental coverage with no co-pay or deductible for children in families up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level.

Over 1/3 of the state's pediatricians and family practice providers have been trained to deliver oral health preventive services during well-child visits, further expanding access to care.

For more information, contact Washington Dental Service Foundation: (206) 528-7327 or visit OralHealthWatch.org.

References

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