

The Importance of Oral Health

Oral health is essential to overall health across the lifespan. Early decay and tooth loss in children can result in failure to thrive, impaired speech development, sleep loss and absence from or an inability to perform well in school. 90% of American adults have experienced dental decay and almost half have severe gum disease that can lead to many lost work days. Sadly, almost 25% of U.S. older adults have lost all their teeth

Dental challenges also exist for certain Nebraska population groups that include rural, low income, minorities, disabled, veterans, refugees/new immigrants and pregnant women.

Overall Magnitude of The Issue

- According to BRFSS 2014 data, 66.4% of NE. **adults** report that they visited a dentist during the past year. The CDC and ADA report lower access rates near 45% for **all ages**.

Trends

- The percentage of NE. adults receiving dental care has declined steadily from 2005-2010 and slightly from 2012-2014.
- The percent of NE. adult tooth extractions has declined steadily from 2005-2010.

National Comparisons

- 63.9% of NE 3rd grade **children** had decay experience in 2015-16, higher than US rate
- 32.% of NE 3rd grade children had untreated caries in 2015-16, higher than US
- 29.5% of NE HS children had untreated caries in 2015-16, higher than US rate
- 45.9 of NE **adults** in 2014 reported loss of any permanent teeth, less than U.S. rate

Key Disparities

- Rural children have higher rates of caries experience & untreated decay and they have lower rates of dental sealants than urban children.
- In 2013, only half (49.3) of low-income children and youth eligible for Medicaid benefits received preventive dental services during the past year.
- In 2013, only 22.1% of 6-9 age Medicaid children received dental sealants.
- 2014, 15.3% of working class had no medical insurance. It is estimated that more than two times as many are without dental health insurance...approximately 350,000
- The number of dental patients visiting hospital ERs per year has doubled from 2003 to 2013 and the costs have increased five-fold to over 8 million USD per year.

Dental Data The Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors request each state provide oral health surveillance data. Nebraska has dental information on 2015-2016 Head Start children and 2015-2016 3rd Grade Students and will start a survey of older adults in 2018.

Why Oral Health Should Be a Priority

Dental disease is one of the most preventable of all health problems. Proper dental hygiene, good eating habits, and regular professional dental care can greatly decrease the risk of developing cavities and gum disease. Evidence based community measures such as water fluoridation, fluoride varnish and preventive sealants can reduce this disease up to 60%. However, untreated dental decay can quickly lead to pain, abscesses, loss of teeth and a breakdown of proper functioning dentition. Periodontal infections are a chronic inflammatory disease linked to other serious health risks such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and respiratory illness.