

## Children's Health Insurance Program

### Fact Sheet — Children's Dental Disease

**Despite tremendous declines in childhood cavities, tooth decay remains the single most common chronic disease of childhood.** Healthy People 2000 oral health update in 1995 shows that 52% of 6-8 year olds have tooth decay — making it 5-8 times more common than asthma, which is usually cited as the most common chronic condition of childhood.

**Fewer and fewer children have more and more tooth decay.** NIDR reports that 80% of tooth decay is now found in only 25% of children.

**Tooth decay is increasingly a disease of low and modest income children — children covered by CHIP.** Low income is the single best predictor of high caries experience in children. Analysis of NHANES III caries epidemiology data shows that amount of decay in children is inversely related to income level.

**Low income children do not get the dental services they need.** Less than 1-in-5 Medicaid children receive the EPSDT — required preventive dental screening or service. ("Children's Dental Services under Medicaid" Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General) The Government Accounting Office (GAO) reports that lack of dental insurance is a strong predictor of lack of dental care.

**A substantial proportion of decay in young children goes untreated.** NHANES III shows that 47% of decay in children ages 2-9 is untreated.

**Key children's oral health indicators are slipping.** The Healthy People 2000 oral health indicators show an increase in the percentage of children who have untreated cavities (from 28% in 1986 to 31% in 1995) and a decrease in the percentage of children who see a dentist before kindergarten (from 66% in 1986 to 63% in 1995).

**"Early Childhood Caries" (Baby Bottle Tooth Decay) — a particularly severe form of rampant decay in toddlers — continues to be highly prevalent in many Native American and minority communities.** (*Public Health Reports* Volume 110)

**Parents know it is a problem.** Among parents who feel that their children have unmet health care needs, 57% report that an unmet need is for dental care compared with 12% for vision or prescription. (1997 National Health Interview Survey)

**Communities know it is a problem.** When low income communities assess their own health care needs, dental care for children is frequently cited in top three unmet needs. (Anecdotal report from "Health of the Cities" program and from state public health officials)

**Children suffer significant morbidity from tooth decay — missed school days, bed days, low activity days.** NIDR reports significant annual bed days from tooth decay in children. CDC states that untreated tooth decay results in pain, infection, dysfunction and poor appearance/low self-esteem among affected children.

**Early childhood caries is associated with poor growth and poor nutrition in children.** (*Pediatric Dentistry* Volume 14)