



## **Children's Oral Health**

It is difficult to overstate the importance of good oral health to a child's well-being. Tooth decay, an infectious and progressive disease caused by bacteria in the mouth, is the number one chronic health problem affecting children. They need their teeth to eat properly, talk, smile, and feel good about themselves. Kids with cavities experience pain and may have trouble chewing and staying focused in school.

By the time they enter kindergarten, more than half of California's children have already experienced dental decay, nearly one-third have untreated decay and almost one in five have extensive decay. By third grade, more than seventy percent of California's children have experienced dental decay.

The potential consequences of poor oral health are numerous. Estimates show that more than half a million California children miss school annually due to dental problems. Left untreated, tooth decay can become severe enough to require emergency room treatment. Severe dental disease often requires the use of general anesthesia and hospitalization – a frightening experience for a child. Hospital stays for such treatment can extend over several days, with costs exceeding \$20,000 – all for a health problem that is preventable.

The California Dental Association believes dental professionals, public officials, parents, and other stakeholders must join forces to improve prevention of tooth decay beginning in early childhood. CDA has embraced a leadership role toward this goal, supporting legislation that now requires children to have a dental checkup during their first year in public school.

CDA also funds a broad array of public education programs; provides enhanced training for dentists who treat young children; promotes the expansion of school-based decay prevention programs; and is a strong supporter of community water fluoridation. We also have vigorously opposed changes to the Denti-Cal program that negatively affect the provision of care to California's neediest children. On behalf of patients, we advocate the coverage of comprehensive preventive services, such as dental sealants, topical fluoride applications and disease prevention counseling by insurance companies.