

## **Improving Oral Health in Infants and Young Children by Mandating Dental Visits From Their Pediatrician**

Dental caries is the most common chronic disease of childhood, occurring four times more frequently than asthma. It is a preventable disease, however if left untreated, it can lead to significant morbidity including pain, infection, and serious life-threatening events.

Evidence suggests that successful prevention of dental disease requires intervention within the first years of life. Thus, the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD), American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and American Dental Association (ADA) recommend all children have their first dental visit during the first year of life. California law requires children who are enrolling in public school to receive an oral health assessment by a dental professional by May 31st of the first school year. Yet, studies report children are being increasingly treated for dental caries. While utilization of dental services has gone up, along with the treatment of dental disease, this finding also suggests we are getting children into dental care too late.

We would like to provide a proposal to increase preventative dental health services and intervene before the formation of caries in young infants and children. Our proposal would be to mandate routine dental visits to the pediatric dentist referred by the pediatrician.

Strong clinical, theoretical, and scientific evidence support early dental visits to improve health outcomes and reduce dental related costs. A study by Savage et al found children who received earlier preventative care tended to have lower subsequent dental related costs accumulated. A systematic review in 2014 found early preventative dental visits were associated with reduced restorative care visits and related expenses in the first years of life.

We would like to request funding from the AAPD foundation through the Healthy Smiles, Healthy Children Initiative. In addition, we would love the support and request for extra funding from HRSA to grant this proposal to promote oral health in young children and infants by collaborating with pediatricians. To promote our policy, we will use this funding to lobby with the local chapter of American Society of Pediatricians and the AAPD. In addition, we will use these funds to create health literacy brochures, videos, and other aids on the importance of early dental visits. These resources will be allocated to local dentists, pediatricians, and federal qualified health centers to be further distributed to families and guardians in order to spread awareness of our policy.

With earlier intervention, we are confident that by mandating earlier dental visits will promote oral health in young children and infants. We are confident that working collaboratively with pediatricians who refer children to see a dentist regularly will decrease the incidence of early

childhood caries. Our strategy will promote oral health education, improve hygiene, and can lead to a better dental health outcome for California children before they are school-aged.

## References

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