

ORAL HEALTH FINDINGS

Arizona Preschool Children

FACT SHEET #1

ARIZONA'S YOUNGEST CHILDREN SUFFER FROM TOOTH DECAY

Many children start school with a chronic disease that is largely preventable – tooth decay. Early childhood tooth decay can start as soon as the teeth erupt.

The Arizona Department of Health Services, Office of Oral Health, Arizona Preschool Oral Health Survey¹ shows that **34% of preschool children** (age four and younger) have experienced tooth decay. Tooth decay starts early and progresses quickly in preschool children and by Kindergarten, more than half of Arizona children have experienced tooth decay. **(Figure 1)**

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRIMARY TEETH

From the age of six months to three years, a child's first set of teeth erupts. The 20 primary teeth (baby teeth) are important to the child's development and well-being. Healthy teeth and a healthy smile help a child develop self-esteem. Baby teeth are needed:

- To bite and chew food;
- For speech development;
- For normal development of the jaw bones and muscles of the face; and
- To hold space for and guide adult teeth into proper position.

Tooth decay can lead to pain and infection. If early childhood tooth decay is neglected and untreated, it can affect adult teeth and have lasting detrimental effects on a child's health and well being.² In rare cases, tooth decay can result in life-threatening infection.

CHILDREN WITH UNTREATED TOOTH DECAY

Children with tooth decay need professional dental care. Treatment may require fillings, crowns, root canals and/or extractions.

In Arizona, 28% of preschool children have untreated tooth decay. As age increases so does untreated tooth decay prevalence. By the time children reach age four, 40% will have untreated tooth decay. (Figure 2)

Figure 1: Tooth Decay Experience

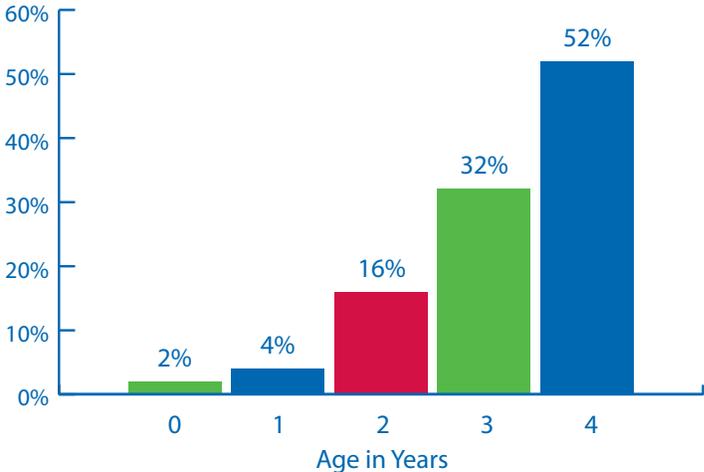
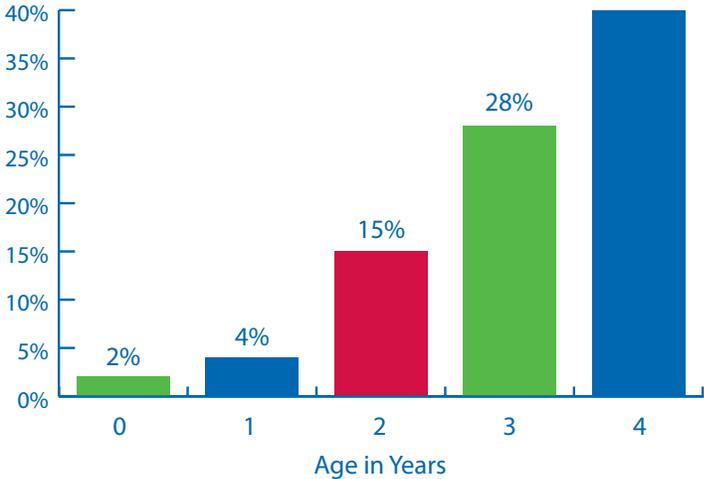


Figure 2: Untreated Tooth Decay



SEVERITY OF TOOTH DECAY

Arizona children have a significant burden of oral disease; by the time they enter Kindergarten, children who have experienced tooth decay will have more than 3 teeth affected by tooth decay.

The urgency of dental treatment reflects both the severity of tooth decay and how soon a child should receive care. Arizona preschool children have the following dental treatment needs:

- **37% of 4-year-olds have early treatment needs; that is, they should receive dental care within the next several weeks to avoid more significant problems.**
- **3% of 4-year-olds have urgent treatment needs; that is, they have pain and/or infection due to severe decay and should have dental treatment within 24-48 hours to avoid critical problems.**

TOOTH DECAY TRENDS IN ARIZONA

A comparison of the prevalence of tooth decay in 1994-1995 and in 2008-2009 shows that there has not been substantial progress made in reducing these rates for preschool children in Arizona. Currently, tooth decay rates for 4-year-olds are higher than in previous years. (*Figure 3*)

DENTAL VISITS

Children are not getting needed dental visits. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children be seen by a dentist within 6 months of the first tooth erupting, by 1 year of age or whichever comes first. Only 6% of children ages birth to one had seen a dentist, according to parents' reports. Dental visit rates were higher among older children, with about three-fourths of 4-year-olds having ever visited a dentist. (*Figure 4*)

WHAT IS NEEDED TO REDUCE TOOTH DECAY?

Prevention of tooth decay needs a comprehensive, integrated approach that addresses many factors including:

- **Environment** (e.g., access to community water fluoridation and number of dental providers);
- **Personal or social norms/behaviors** (e.g., health literacy, diet, oral hygiene care and transmission of disease);
- **Political** (e.g., funding, support for community water fluoridation and scope of dental practice);
- **Economic** (e.g., payment of dental services and dental insurance).

The improvement in oral health of young children is not a task that can be accomplished by any single agency. Rather, actions must be developed through public and private collaboration and partnerships that focus on common goals for optimal oral health.

Figure 3: Tooth Decay Trends in Arizona

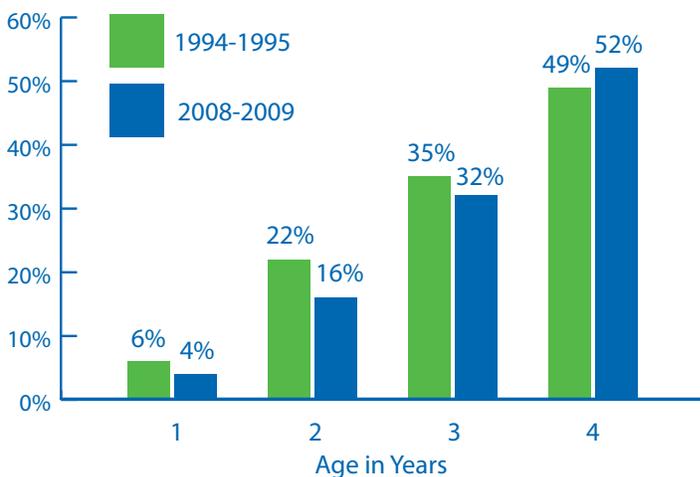
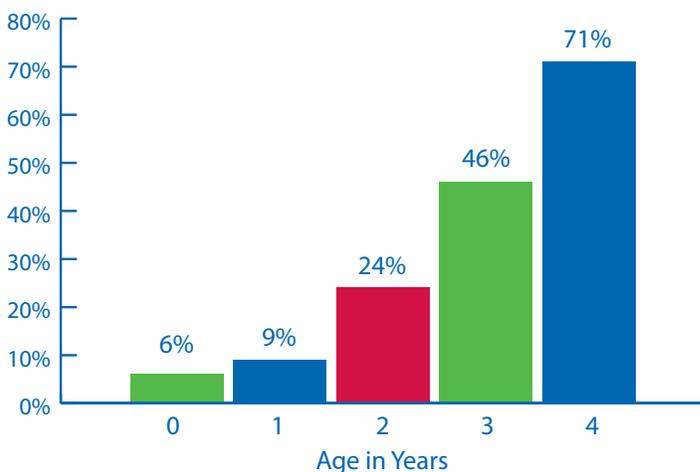


Figure 4: Dental Visits Reported by Parents



REFERENCES:

1. Arizona Department of Health Services, Bureau of Women's and Children's Health, Office of Oral Health. Arizona Oral Health Survey of Preschool Children, 2008-2009.
2. National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center, Promoting Awareness, Preventing Pain: Facts on Early Childhood Caries (ECC) [fact sheet], 2004. Available from: <http://www.mchoralhealth.org/PDFs/ECCFactSheet.pdf>.

Supported in part from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau (Title V, Social Security Act).