

*Babies form **over 80%** of the brain connections that determine how they learn, think, and grow before they are three years old.*

That's why it's so important to invest in oral health from day one.

WHY Good Oral Health is Critical for Young Children

Oral health is about more than healthy teeth and the absence of disease. It is essential to a young child's overall health, well-being, and development.

While most Californians enjoy excellent oral health, cavities are the most prevalent chronic health problem among California's children. Tooth decay is the number one reason children are absent from kindergarten. Many children go without seeing a dentist each year, even though regular dental visits and good oral hygiene can prevent most dental disease.

Although pediatric dental coverage is available through all Covered California health plans and Medi-Cal, access to dental care remains a critical problem, as relatively few dental care providers offer care to young children enrolled in Medi-Cal. Even fewer providers offer a full range of necessary dental services for young children.

Access to preventive and restorative services, as well as oral health education, play a critical role in ensuring good oral health, and lead to better overall health and well-being over a child's lifespan.



FIRST 5 *Calls to Action*

Increase families' utilization of essential Medi-Cal dental services: Raise the Denti-Cal reimbursement rate in order to recruit providers to offer essential dental services for the state's youngest children.

Reach more children in underserved areas of the state: Increase the state's budget investment to promote the provision of dental care in alternative settings, such as schools and Head Start sites, through statewide implementation of the Virtual Dental Home.



Nearly 1.7 million children under age 6 enrolled in Medi-Cal in 2013. Of those children, **63%** did not have a single dental visit in the previous year.

Oral Health in San Joaquin County

According to the 2016 San Joaquin County Community Health Needs Assessment, data indicate that oral health outcomes are worse in San Joaquin County than in other parts of California, particularly among children. Access to oral health services is a concern in all age groups, marked by limited dental visits and difficulty finding affordable and nearby care.

20% of Community Survey respondents report that tooth problems are a top health concern in their community.

Access to Dental Care

Access to dental care is especially challenging for low-income residents. The free and discounted dental services in the county are located in Stockton, and there are limited transportation options. While parts of San Joaquin County are designated as Health Professional Shortage Areas for primary care, they are not yet formally designated as shortage areas for dental care.

Percent of children ages 2-11 who have never had a dental visit:



Percentage of low-income young children (ages 0-3) that have been to a dentist:

San Joaquin County ranks **50th** with 19 percent.

Oral Health and Nutrition

Factors that may contribute to oral health needs include poverty, as well as an unhealthy diet that includes sugar-sweetened beverages.

Percent of children age 2-11 consuming 2+ sugar sweetened beverages on previous day:



Did You Know?

- Dental cavities are **five times more common** than asthma and seven times more common than allergies in children.
- More than **40 percent** of children have tooth decay by the time they reach kindergarten.
- Children with cavities in their baby teeth are at **much greater risk** for cavities in their adult teeth.