

Children's Oral Health in Arizona

findings – A conclusion reached after examination or investigation.

Too many children start first grade with a chronic disease that is largely preventable – tooth decay.



The Arizona Department of Health Services, Office of Oral Health, Arizona School Dental Survey 1999-2003¹ shows that nearly half of kindergartners and six out of every ten first graders have had tooth decay. In fact, tooth decay (cavities) is the most common chronic disease among children – 5 times more common than asthma.²

Oral health is essential for school-readiness:

- Each year, dental disease results in nearly 52 million lost school hours. – *Gift HC 1997*
- Dental disease results in children's failure to thrive, impaired speech development, absence from and inability to concentrate in school and reduced self-esteem. – *Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion 2000*
- Dental disease results in children's decreased school performance, poor social relationships, and less success later in life. – *US General Accounting Office 2000*

The good news is that there are solutions for improving the oral health of Arizona's children and ensuring that they are, indeed, ready to succeed.

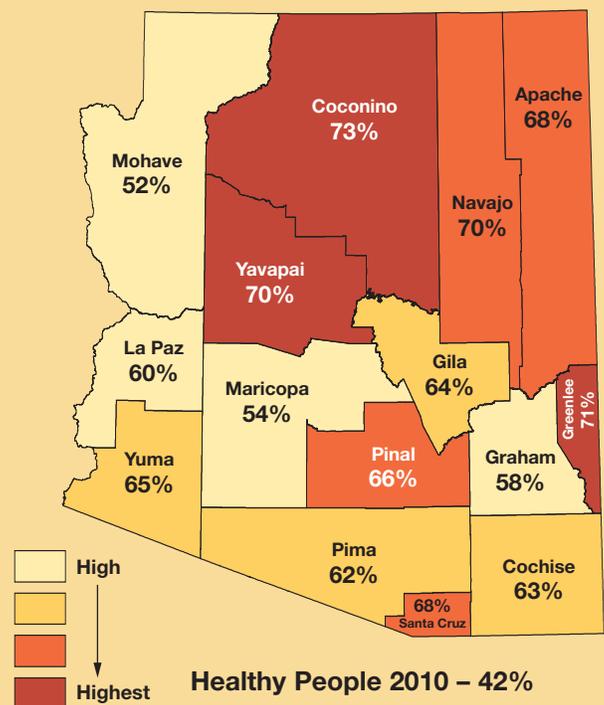
Distribution of tooth decay – children are affected in all Arizona counties

60% of children ages 6-8 have experienced tooth decay.

- 60% of children have at least one tooth with a filling and/or an untreated cavity. Decay experience varies by county across the state. The disease affects more children in all Arizona counties than the *Healthy People 2010*

(continued on back)

Percent of Children who have Experienced Decay



Source Data: ADHS OOH Arizona School Dental Survey, 1999-2003.

¹ Arizona Department of Health Services: Division of Public Health Services, Public Health Prevention Services, Office of Oral Health: Arizona School Dental Survey, 1999-2003.

² NCHS, NHANES III 1996

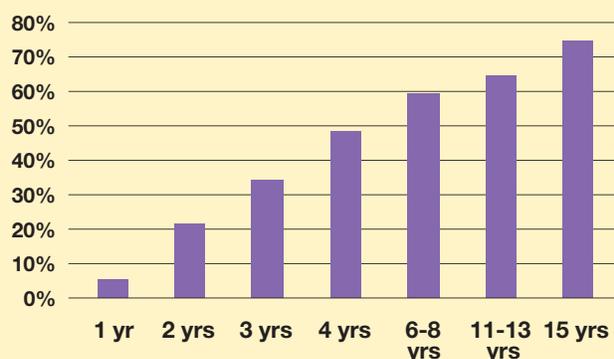
target of 42%. Therefore, efforts to reduce tooth decay need to be distributed among all counties. Arizona is one and a half times above the national *Healthy People 2010* objective.

Cost

It is estimated that Arizonans have spent more than \$44 million³ on restorative dental services for children in grades kindergarten through third and another \$30 million is required for treatment of current decay. All for a disease that is virtually preventable.

- Cost estimates do not include regular exams, fluoride treatments or cleanings necessary to prevent tooth decay and keep a child healthy.
- Cost estimates do not account for time away from school or work to seek dental treatment.
- A cavity only grows larger and more expensive to repair the longer it remains untreated.

Percent of Children who have Experienced Decay by Age⁴



Oral health is a chronic disease that impacts overall health. Because of the progressive nature of the disease, poor oral health in children can impact

their health into adulthood. Research continues to link oral health and the following health problems:

- Diabetes
- Cardiovascular diseases (stroke)
- Premature and/or low birth weight babies
- Failure to thrive

Like these other conditions, prevention of oral disease and tooth decay needs a comprehensive, integrated approach that addresses many factors including:

- **Environment** (*access to community water fluoridation, number of dental providers, transportation*)
- **Personal or social norms/behaviors** (*daily oral hygiene care, diet, oral health IQ, transmission of disease, values for good oral health*)
- **Political** (*funding, support for community water fluoridation, numerous important health issues, competing interest groups, scope of dental practice*)
- **Economic** (*availability/access to dental insurance, costs associated with delivering dental treatment*)

The improvement in oral health for children is not a task that can be accomplished by any single agency, be it the Federal government, State health agencies, or private organizations. Rather, actions must be developed through collaboration and partnerships involving both public and private groups focused on one common goal – preventing tooth decay in children to ensure a lifetime of optimal oral health.

³ Estimation based on use of 2003 ADA Survey of Dental Fees, single surface amalgam, mean for Mountain Region.

⁴ ADHS, OOH: Arizona Dental Survey of Preschool Children, 1994-1995; Arizona School Dental Survey, 1999-2003; Arizona Survey of School Age Children, 1987-1990.



This is the first in a series of briefs reporting on the oral health of Arizona's school children in kindergarten through third grade. For additional information or to learn how to improve the oral health of children go to:

Office of Oral Health
www.azdhs.gov/cfhs/ooH
602.542.1866

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