



New Survey by America's Pediatric Dentists Highlights Gaps in Oral Health Knowledge and Generational Differences in Caring for Little Teeth

Oral health a priority to parents and caregivers, but nearly three out of four are not taking kids to dentist by recommended age

CHICAGO, October 3, 2018 – A new national survey conducted on behalf of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) reveals nearly three quarters (74 percent) of U.S. parents do not take their child to the dentist by their first birthday, the age recommended by AAPD. Of the quarter of parents (26 percent) who do take their child to the dentist by their first birthday, millennial parents (29 percent) are more likely to take their child to the dentist by age 1 than any other generation. Additionally, while 96 percent of parents say oral health is important to their family, many do not think toothaches are a serious ailment, with 3 in 10 parents (31 percent) ranking toothaches as the least serious ailment compared to tummy aches, earaches, headaches and sore throats.

Tooth decay remains the most common chronic infectious disease among children, and can compromise the health, development and quality of life of children both in the short and long term.¹ The good news is that it's nearly 100 percent preventable. Caring for teeth at an early age is critical and establishing a Dental Home is the first step to creating a lifetime of healthy habits for children. A Dental Home sets the foundation for an ongoing relationship between the dentist and the patient family. It is also important not to ignore signs of toothaches at any age. This is especially true with young children, as toothaches can be a warning sign for a number of ailments including cavities or infection, which can be treated and prevented if caught early enough.

“While it's encouraging to know so many parents value oral health, the survey also reveals parents need more information on the first steps to take when it comes to creating an overall foundation for the health and well-being of their child,” says AAPD President and pediatric dentist Joe Castellano, D.D.S.

“By establishing a Dental Home early on in a child’s life, the chance for developing tooth decay is significantly reduced. A pediatric dentist can provide parents with helpful information, including how to put a brushing routine into action for your child.”

Protecting Your Pearly Whites

Baby teeth serve as the blueprint and pathway for permanent teeth. Despite eventually falling out, preventing tooth decay in baby teeth can help stop cavities and decay in permanent teeth. The survey reveals parents have a mixed understanding of what ‘healthy’ foods for kids’ teeth may include. Nearly half of parents (49 percent) believe pureed fruit pouches are a healthy snack choice and more than one third of parents think granola bars (39 percent) are healthy for kids’ teeth. On the contrary, pureed fruit and granola bars have concentrated sugars and stick to the grooves on kids’ teeth, giving bacteria plenty of time to do damage. However, cheese is one snack healthy for kids’ teeth, as it neutralizes acids in the mouth due to an increase in saliva production. Parents are spot on in this knowledge, as 7 in 10 (73 percent) believe cheese is indeed a healthy snack choice for their kids’ teeth.

Drilling Down on the Generational Differences

Choosing the right foods for children is a big part of maintaining healthy teeth, as is establishing and practicing a proper brushing routine. The AAPD recommends brushing and flossing for two minutes twice a day. About half (49 percent) of parents with kids between the ages of 4 and 7 help their children brush their teeth every time. Interestingly, younger parents were more likely to regularly help their kids brush versus older parents: 80 percent of parents ages 18-24 say they help their child brush every time, while only 42 percent of parents ages 45-54 do the same. Brushing habits make an impact as kids get older and they choose to implement the habits they learned while brushing teeth with mom, dad or their caregiver.

Tooth Fairy vs. Santa Claus

Parents and caregivers make countless decisions on a daily basis. One common debate is when to tell children the truth about make-believe characters, such as the Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy and the Easter Bunny. Millennial and Generation X parents are equally split on who they would tell their children the truth about first, Santa Claus or the Tooth Fairy, proving oral healthcare is an important factor in both the real and imaginary lives of children.

The Tooth Fairy not only plays a role in children’s lives, but parents,’ too. While helping a child brush his or her teeth, parents can become aware of any loose teeth, to ‘prepare’ for the Tooth Fairy. This way, you will not be one of the 43 percent of parents who admit to overpaying their child for his or her tooth because they didn’t have any small bills or change. According to the survey, 3 in 10 (29 percent) of these parents overpay their child with a \$10 bill; 1 in 5 (20 percent) of these parents overpay with a \$20 bill.

Take Action

The AAPD is the “Big Authority on Little Teeth” and remains committed to providing optimal oral health for all children. To establish a lifetime of healthy oral health habits, take your child to a pediatric dentist by age one, or at the sign of his first tooth. AAPD aims to educate parents and caregivers about the critical need for early dental check-ups, a Dental Home and the importance of regular oral care to prevent against childhood tooth decay, which affects nearly 1 in 3 children ages 2 to 5 years old in the U.S.²

For more information about children’s oral health and to find a pediatric dentist in your area, visit mychildrensteeth.org.

¹<https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/research/data-statistics/dental-caries>

²http://www.aapd.org/aapd%E2%80%99s_state_of_little_teeth_report_an_examination_of_the_epidemic_of_tooth_decay_among_our_youngest_children/

Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted between August 10 – 13, 2018 via an online survey among 1,003 parents in the United States with kids aged 12 or younger. To qualify for this survey, respondents had to be either the sole or shared decision maker for healthcare-related decisions for their child or children. The margin of error is +/- 2 percentage points with a confidence interval of 95 percent.

About the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) is the recognized authority on children's oral health. As advocates for children's oral health, the AAPD promotes evidence-based policies and clinical guidelines; educates and informs policymakers, parents and guardians, and other health care professionals; fosters research; and provides continuing professional education for pediatric dentists and general dentists who treat children. Founded in 1947, the AAPD is a not-for-profit professional membership association representing the specialty of pediatric dentistry. Its 10,500 members provide primary care and comprehensive dental specialty treatments for infants, children, adolescents and individuals with special health care needs.

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