



# Principles on Preventing and Managing Pediatric Dental Caries

Promoting the oral health of children right from the start is the best defense against ongoing, disruptive and costly care. Tooth decay remains the most common chronic condition of childhood in the US and is affecting an increasing number of children at the youngest ages. It too often results in significant functional, educational, and social consequences. Dental caries, the disease that results in cavities, is preventable and manageable with the right information and skills. However, if the disease is left untreated it is progressive and can be transmitted from caregiver-to-child. Based on 40 years of established science, Children's Dental Health Project (CDHP) holds as a primary tenant that preventing and managing dental caries are the best strategies for reducing overall disease burden and improving the oral health of all Americans. Therefore, CDHP's work is guided by the following principles to develop, test, and advocate for methods of preventing and managing pediatric dental disease.

## **Providing appropriate education, experience, and incentives to health and dental providers to prevent and manage dental disease is crucial to the oral health of America.**

Science-based standards, guidelines, and protocols for effective clinical, behavioral, and nutritional approaches to assessing individual risk, preventing, and managing are now needed. Dental clinicians are ill equipped educationally and experientially to counsel families of infants and toddlers in the prevention of dental disease based on individual risk or develop individual disease-management care plans to effectively suppress disease once active. In addition, medical providers receive limited to no training on the oral health of children although they have the potential for being primary sources of preventive care. Medicine and dentistry, along with others professions that touch the lives of families, should train their future workforce on prevention and disease management and provide opportunities to put those skills to work in community and clinical settings.

## **Managing the oral health of women who will become mothers is an efficient method for preventing dental disease in children and improving the oral health of America.**

The cause for the recent rise in dental caries in young children is multi-faceted, however it is preventable. Since dental caries is a transmissible disease – primarily from mother-to-child (likely due to numerous behavioral and biological factors) – it is critical to provide dental care to pregnant women and women of childbearing age, both for their own health and to delay the initial transmission. Due to a lack of clear clinical guidelines, only one of every five women who gave birth in 2004 saw a dentist during pregnancy.<sup>i</sup> Beyond dental care, mothers, along with fathers and caregivers, also play an important role in establishing healthy behaviors with children. Having the information and skills to make appropriate decisions about a child's diet, hygiene, and fluoride use are essential in order to establish healthy behaviors early in a child's life.

## **Increasing public awareness of dental disease prevention and management is essential to improving oral health in America.**

The 2000 Surgeon General's report on oral health described the overall lack of understanding of the importance of oral health and its relationship to general health, regardless of income.<sup>ii</sup> Because the caries process is not commonly distinguished from the cavities that are the result of the disease, few know dental caries is preventable or have the specific knowledge and skills to prevent or manage it. Additional investments in effective campaigns to inform to and engage the public with information to understand, prevent and manage dental disease will provide useful in improving the oral health of children and families.

Therefore, Children's Dental Health Project supports the following.

- Programs that improve dental and medical education on the prevention and management of dental caries.
- Incentives to professionals for education on and administration of dental caries prevention and management interventions (including individualized care plans like those employed for managing childhood diabetes, asthma, and obesity).
- Policies and programs that support and/or provide dental care and education to prenatal and perinatal women.
- Public education on the prevention and management of dental caries.
- Scientifically supported programs that provide cost-effective, community-based prevention including but not limited to, community water fluoridation, fluoride varnish, and dental sealants.

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<sup>i</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Preconception and Interconception Health Status of Women Who Recently Gave Birth to a Live-Born Infant — Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS), United States, 26 Reporting Areas, 2004. Surveillance Summaries, December 14. MMWR 2007;56(No. SS-10).

<sup>ii</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health, 2000b. Available at <http://www.nidr.nih.gov/sgr/sgrohweb/home.htm>. Accessed May 6, 2008.