

Oral Health Impacts School Readiness



Oral health is an integral part of overall health, and when children are not healthy, this affects their ability to learn, develop and thrive. Dental disease can be prevented, early learning environments provide a unique opportunity to promote prevention, support children's oral health and overall health.

Good oral health improves overall health and saves money

Washington State:

- Nearly 40% of children start Kindergarten with tooth decay; almost 15% have rampant decay (7 or more decayed/filled teeth).
- 58% of 3rd grade children have tooth decay in primary and permanent teeth.
- Low-income, Native American, and other racial and ethnic minority children have the highest rates of tooth decay.
- Medicaid spent more than \$55 million treating children for dental disease.

The impacts of tooth decay

- **Pain:** Dental decay can cause intense pain. Children may experience anxiety, fatigue, irritability, depression and withdrawal from normal activities.
- **High cost dental care:** Dental decay requires expensive dental treatment that could be avoided.
- **Attention problems:** Children with infected and painful teeth have a hard time relaxing, sitting still, and paying attention in class.
- **Delayed social development:** When a young child's front teeth are damaged or missing, they often can't form words correctly and tend to retreat into shyness and avoid socialization.
- **Low self-esteem:** Children with dental decay or tooth loss may feel embarrassed and will be less likely to smile.
- **Infection:** Infected teeth may lead to ear infections, sinus infections, abscess, high treatment costs and in extreme cases, death.
- **Nutrition problems:** Painful teeth make chewing and swallowing difficult and uncomfortable. Children with dental disease often do not get the nutrition they need to grow.
- **Tooth loss:** Early loss of baby teeth can prevent kids from speaking clearly and eating properly, and inhibit teeth from growing into place correctly.
- **Sleep deprivation:** Children with chronically painful teeth have trouble getting a good night's sleep.
- **Missed school days:** Children with dental disease miss more school days than other children, disrupting their educational and social experiences.



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