



# NATIONAL CHILDREN'S DENTAL HEALTH MONTH

Tooth decay is one of the most common chronic diseases of childhood. In fact, more than 1 in 5 children (ages 2 to 5 years) have at least one cavity. When oral health conditions are left untreated, this may cause problems with eating, speaking, playing, and learning.<sup>1</sup> As February is National Children's Dental Health Month, HARC, sponsored by Molina Healthcare, presents the following infographic with statistics about child dental care in the Coachella Valley as well as information about the health impact of oral health, ways to avoid tooth decay, and resources in the valley for dental care.

## Did you know?<sup>1</sup>

- Children from **low-income families** are more than twice as likely (25%) to have **untreated cavities**, compared with children from higher-income households (11%).
- Fluoride varnish, which is used as a dental treatment, can **prevent about one third of cavities** in children.
- Children living in communities with **fluoridated tap water** have fewer **cavities** than children whose water is not fluoridated.



## In the Coachella Valley<sup>2</sup>...



In 2019, **16.7%** of local children had **never been to a dentist**. That is approximately 14,749 children.



The American Academy of Pediatric Dentists recommend for children to make their first visit to the dentist by their first birthday. However, **only 17.9% of local children made their first dental visit** in this age bracket.



It is also recommended that children go to the dentist every 6 months. In 2019, **7.6% of local children (5,504 children) had not been to the dentist in the past year**. The most common reason for children not visiting the dentist is because there are no problems. This response may indicate a lack of understanding of the importance of preventive dental care.

## Health Impact of Oral Health<sup>3</sup>

Oral health is an essential part of staying healthy. Research has shown a link between oral health and several chronic diseases. For example, gum disease is associated with diabetes, heart disease, and stroke.

In pregnant women, poor oral health has also been associated with premature births and low birth weight.

Many of these oral diseases may be prevented with regular dental care.



## What Is Fluoride?<sup>4</sup>

Fluoride is a natural mineral with the ability to safely slow or stop cavities from forming by helping to strengthen the enamel layer on teeth.

When fluoride is absorbed into the weakened surface of a tooth, it strengthens the enamel, which is the hardest tissue in the human body.

Enamel needs fluoride to help fight the cavity-causing acids that form when bacteria in the mouth combine with sugars.

Fluoride can be found in drinking water as well as other sources such as toothpaste and mouth rinse. These can help prevent tooth decay and make your child's teeth stronger.

However, too much fluoride can also be harmful. Too much fluoride in the first eight years of life, when permanent teeth are forming, can result in white lines or streaks on the teeth. Topical fluoride rinses and toothpastes are not strong enough to cause harm. As always, consult your child's doctor or dentist to ensure that you are giving your child the best dental care.



## Dental Care for Babies<sup>1</sup>

Always consult with your child's doctor or dentist. For guidance, the CDC recommends the following dental care for babies:

Wipe gums twice a day with a soft, clean cloth in the morning after the first feeding and before bed to wipe away bacteria and sugars that may cause cavities.

When teeth come in, start brushing twice a day with a soft, small-bristled toothbrush and plain water.



Visit the dentist by your baby's first birthday to spot signs of problems early.



Talk to your dentist or doctor about putting fluoride varnish on your child's teeth as soon as the first tooth appears.

For children younger than 2, consult first with your doctor or dentist regarding the use of fluoride toothpaste.

## Dental Care for Children

The CDC and the American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) recommend the following dental care for children:



Brush their teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.<sup>1</sup>

Drink water that contains fluoride.<sup>1</sup>

Ask your child's dentist to apply dental sealants when appropriate.<sup>1</sup>

Begin flossing children's teeth as soon as two teeth touch.<sup>4</sup>

## Toothpaste Quantity for Children

The CDC recommends that if your child is younger than 6, watch them brush their teeth to make sure they use the right amount of toothpaste and do not swallow it.<sup>1</sup>

According to the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, as soon as teeth start to appear up until age 3, using a tiny smear of toothpaste, similar to the size of a grain of rice, is best for brushing kids' teeth.<sup>5</sup>



The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends that, from ages 3-6 years, the toothpaste can move up to a pea-sized amount.<sup>5</sup>

# Preventive Dental Care and Resources in the Coachella Valley

## Community Highlight: Denti-Cal/Smile, California

For Denti-Cal members, 20 years of age or younger, Denti-Cal covers the following:

- Dental services, including oral surgeons, X-rays, sealants, fillings, crowns (caps), root canals, dentures and extractions (pulling).
- Dental exams every six months.
- One cleaning every six months.



For more information about Molina Healthcare's dental services, please visit:

<https://www.molinahealthcare.com/members/ca/en-us/mem/medicaid/medical/coverd/dental.aspx>

## More Free or Low-Cost Resources

**Borrego Health** clinics are sliding scale clinics that offers preventive and restorative dental services for children and adults. The costs for their clinic services are based on a person's income and they may offer financial assistance. For more information, please visit <https://www.borregohealth.org/dental-services>.

**Los Medicos Voladores** (LMV) is a volunteer-based nonprofit organization that helps improve the health and well-being of people through the provision of no-cost healthcare and health education clinics in the Coachella Valley. In the past, LMV has offered short-term medical, dental, optometry, and other healthcare clinics. For more information, please visit <https://www.flyingdocs.org/?fbclid=IwAR3PRUvIZ0vBxDpJNC-SEpsvszlr2Nw9GZ7PL8cJS-8GjriMJSc2VOpsNLE>.

**Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo** has a Mecca Dental Clinic that is a sliding scale clinic available to patients who qualify based on family size and income. Mecca Dental Clinic offers dental services such as exams and x-rays, cleanings, gum disease treatment, restorations and more. For more information, please visit <https://cdsdp.org/clinic-locations/mecca-dental-clinic/>.

### Sources:

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/basics/childrens-oral-health/index.html>
2. Coachella Valley Community Health Survey. (2019). HARC. Available online at: <https://harcdata.org/coachella-valley-community-health-survey/executive-report/>
3. <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/leading-health-indicators/2020-lhi-topics/Oral-Health#1>
4. [https://www.adha.org/resources-docs/ncdham/NCDHM\\_Guide\\_2021.pdf](https://www.adha.org/resources-docs/ncdham/NCDHM_Guide_2021.pdf)
5. <https://www.aapd.org/resources/parent/faq/>

For more data and resources, please visit: [HARCdata.org](https://harcdata.org)

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