



Quick Facts About Orange County Children's Oral Health

Preparing your child for a healthy smile begins even before their first tooth appears.

Good oral health habits – from healthy gums, daily brushing and flossing to regular dental visits – are crucial to maintaining healthy teeth.

It's never too early to start fostering those habits in young children. Unfortunately, far too many children in Orange County do not have access to regular dental care, and also aren't learning good oral hygiene habits that help prevent tooth decay and other oral diseases.

In Orange County, preventable tooth decay is the most chronic childhood disease, mirroring a national trend. In fact, across America, it's more prevalent than asthma and obesity combined, resulting in 51+ million lost school hours each year.

One out of five children ages 5 to 11 have at least one untreated decayed tooth, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

In Orange County, the most recent statistics reveal that approximately one out of every 10 children – or nearly 70,000 kids – ages 3 to 11 *have never visited a dentist.*

Why You Should Care

- Though they are small and temporary, a child's first teeth play an integral role in their overall healthy development by helping them properly chew food and speak clearly. Healthy childhood teeth also enable the proper development and placement of permanent teeth.
- Tooth decay is painful. Toothaches are the no. 1 reason for preventable emergency room visits and missed school days in the nation. Poor dental health can affect children's ability to concentrate in school, keep up with peers, and disrupt their education and social development.
- Other health issues, including ear and sinus infections, inflammation, infective endocarditis, and heart disease, can develop as a result of poor oral health habits.
- Poor oral health, including tooth decay, can negatively impact children's self-esteem and mental health, success in later life, and lifetime earning potential.

First 5 Orange County Position Statement

First 5 Orange County believes that every child should have access to regular, quality oral health care services that include screening, preventive care and treatment.

For more than 20 years, we have been a leader in children's oral health by investing in community nonprofits that make dental services affordable and accessible to the county's most vulnerable and at-risk children.

Action Plan

Our action steps are aimed at ensuring that all children from birth to age 5 in Orange County have access to quality oral care and educational resources that help them adopt and maintain good oral hygiene habits for life.

We are working to achieve this through the following:

- Leading the Dental Transformation Initiative (DTI) local pilot project, which established a network of community providers to reach underserved children whose families have difficulty accessing quality dental services.
- Increasing efficiency of services by supporting innovative care-delivery systems, including virtual dental homes, which use mobile dental hygienists who treat children in classroom and community settings. Charts are viewed offsite by dentists who create treatment plans, and care coordinators work with families to ensure their treatment is completed, either onsite or by referring them to affordable clinics.
- Continuing to provide critical investments in dental health. First 5 Orange County has invested more than \$21.5 million in young children's oral health over the past two decades. These funds established Healthy Smiles for Kids of Orange County, a nonprofit providing pediatric dental services such as screenings, treatment and education, to underserved populations, as well as a local dental residency program aimed at increasing the number of pediatric dentists serving Orange County families.
- Actively participating in community efforts aimed at better serving vulnerable populations such as the County's Local Oral Health Plan, which has established working subgroups, including Access and Utilization of Dental Services and Dental Workforce.