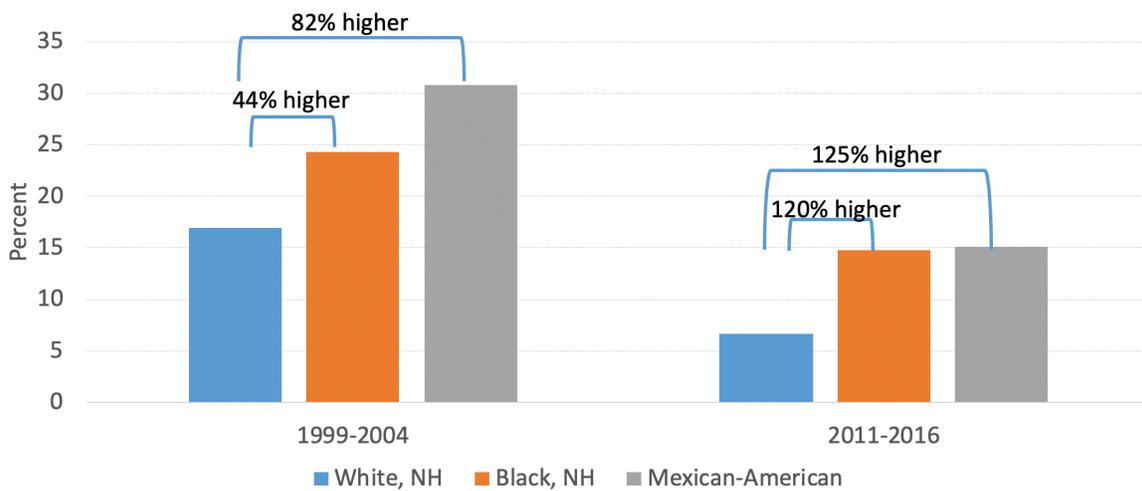


PERSISTENT RACIAL/ETHNIC DISPARITIES IN ORAL HEALTH AMONG CHILDREN

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently released the 2019 Oral Health Surveillance Report, showing the latest U.S. national data on oral health status changes between 1999–2004 and 2011–2016.

While, overall, oral health status has improved, there are still large disparities by race/ethnicity and poverty status for nearly every oral health indicator and relative disparities have increased for many indicators. For children ages two to five years, the relative disparities in untreated tooth decay increased by 76 percentage points for non-Hispanic blacks and by 43 percentage points for Mexican-Americans compared with non-Hispanic white children.

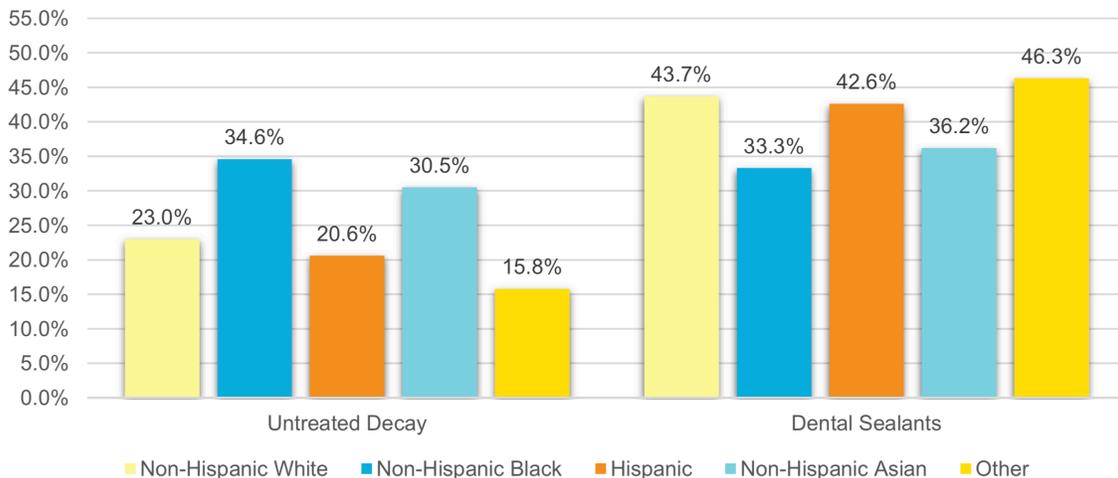
*Prevalence of untreated decay in children age 2-5 years, by race/ethnicity.
United States, 1999–2004 & 2011–2016.*



Reference: CDC. Oral Health Surveillance Report 2019. <https://bit.ly/35ul6vx>.

The national trends in oral health disparities by race/ethnicity also are evident in Florida. A report by Florida Department of Health showed non-Hispanic black students had more untreated decay and fewer dental sealants compared with non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic Asian or Hispanic students.

Prevalence of untreated decay & dental sealants among Florida's 3rd grade children 2016–2017, by race/ethnicity



Reference: Florida Department of Health's Oral Health Status of Florida's Third Grade Children 2016-2017. <https://bit.ly/2YI4FAI>.

WHY IS ACCESS TO ORAL HEALTH CARE IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS?

Published studies during the past decade have documented a strong relationship between poor oral health and school performance. For example, when compared to children with good oral health status, children with poor oral health are more likely to experience oral pain, miss school and are more than twice as likely to perform poorly in school.

Additionally, developmental delays among preschool-aged children from low-income families appear to be associated with increased number of decayed baby teeth. Among children and adolescents ages 5–18 years, dental pain impacts school attendance to the same extent as acute asthma episodes. Preventing and treating children and adolescents' oral health problems improves their functioning, educational achievement and psychosocial development.

HOW TO HELP: SCHOOL-BASED ORAL CARE DELIVERY BY DENTAL THERAPISTS

School-based health centers are an ideal setting to meet the oral health care needs of school-aged children, especially those who come from vulnerable populations, as school-based health centers deliver on-the-spot care in a convenient, affordable manner.

Children from low-income families and underserved minority groups could significantly decrease their risk for dental caries and onset of new diseases by using school-based oral health programs and following the risk-based care recommendations.

While the state of children's oral health can be significantly improved by providing school-based oral health services, it may be too expensive to employ dentists in those programs. Dental therapists can deliver high quality dental care at a lower cost.

Dental therapists deliver care through convenient, affordable, efficient and cost-effective mobile oral health care programs, which reduce barriers, such as transportation and financial hardship. Overall, dental therapists can help increase the availability of oral health care for all populations, including minorities who face disparities, and help students at all grade levels see improved academic performance and better quality of life.

Reference: National Maternal and Child Health Resource Center

WHAT ARE DENTAL THERAPISTS?

Dental therapists are midlevel providers who provide basic dental care to underserved and uninsured patients under the supervision of a dentist. Twelve states now allow a dentist to hire a dental therapist, and Florida has reintroduced legislation during the 2020 Legislative Session, Senate Bill 152 and House Bill 979, to authorize dental therapists in our state.

Dental therapists are able to deliver care in community-based settings, which enables people to receive dental treatment long before they would need to go to the emergency room. Further, dental therapists could serve children in schools and bring on-the-spot care to children who may currently lack access to quality oral health care.

Dental therapists are formally trained to the same national standards as a dentist for the limited procedures they may perform, such as fillings, stainless steel crowns, pulpotomies, cleanings, sealants and application of fluorides. They must also pass the same state clinical licensing exam, sitting next to dental candidates for the procedures they have in common, then apply to the Florida Board of Dentistry for licensure.

LEARN MORE

Floridians for Dental Access is a bipartisan coalition of 57 local, state, and national groups and organizations who see every day how vulnerable populations in our state struggle to be seen by a dentist. Together, we support bringing affordable dental care to these populations by authorizing dental therapists. To learn more, or for additional resources, please contact Coalition Coordinator Cathy Cabanzon at floridiansfordentalaccess@gmail.com, or visit our website at floridiansfordentalaccess.com.