



DEDICATED TO THE
HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN

THE OFFICIAL NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

AAP News

Dental disease in indigenous communities prompts joint policy to expand oral health interventions

Jessica Pupillo

AAP News 2011;32;19

DOI: 10.1542/aapnews.2011326-19

The online version of this article, along with updated information and services, is located on the World Wide Web at:

<http://aapnews.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/32/6/19>

AAP News is the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics. A monthly publication, it has been published continuously since 1985. AAP News is owned, published, and trademarked by the American Academy of Pediatrics, 141 Northwest Point Boulevard, Elk Grove Village, Illinois, 60007. Copyright © 2011 by the American Academy of Pediatrics. All rights reserved. Print ISSN: 1073-0397.

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™



Dental disease in indigenous communities prompts joint policy to expand oral health interventions

by **Jessica Pupillo** • Correspondent

About half of the children Steve A. Holve, M.D., M.P.H., FAAP, treats in his Tuba City, Ariz., practice have dental decay by age 2. By the time they're 4, 90%-95% of them have cavities.

Early childhood caries (ECC) is a striking concern in all indigenous communities in North America, including his practice in Navajo Nation, said Dr. Holve, co-author of a new policy statement from the AAP Committee on Native American Child Health and the Canadian Paediatric Society's First Nations, Inuit and Métis Committee. The joint statement, *Early Childhood Caries in Indigenous Communities* (*Pediatrics*. 2011;127:1190-1198), recommends prevention, clinical care, advocacy and other strategies related to the improvement of oral health of indigenous children of Canada (First Nations, Inuit and Métis) and the United States (American Indian, Alaska Natives).



Dr. Holve

Numerous risk factors

ECC is the presence of tooth decay involving any primary tooth in a child 6 years or younger. Untreated dental decay is found in indigenous children in North America at a rate that's more than three times greater than in non-native children, according to the statement. Patients often must travel from isolated areas to urban centers for restorative and surgical treatments under general anesthesia.

"The influence of early childhood caries on overall childhood health and well-being goes well beyond the mouth, and many of our indigenous clients have not benefitted fully from the many advances to improve oral health in North American children," said statement co-author James Irvine, M.D., FRCPC, a pediatrician in La Ronge, Saskatchewan.

While proper hygiene and a healthy diet can reduce caries, the problem is more profound than lifestyle conditions and choices, Dr. Holve said.

The statement links certain parenting practices among American indigenous populations with increased caries, including prolonged use of the bottle and filling training cups with sugary drinks. In addition, poverty remains one of the greatest risk factors.

ECC is an infectious disease, with *Streptococcus mutans* as the most dominant organism. "Native children are prone to a higher rate of all sorts of infectious diseases already," Dr. Holve said. "This is just one more."



Dr. Irvine



Photo courtesy of Robert Schroth, D.M.D.

A new joint policy outlines what pediatricians can do to help reduce caries in indigenous children.

Pediatricians' role

Pediatricians can help reduce the rates of ECC in their young patients, who likely won't see a dentist in their first two years of life, Dr. Holve said.

"The role that primary care pediatricians and other providers play in various indigenous communities in North America place them in a unique position to complement the work of our dental health professional colleagues," Dr. Irvine said.

The policy calls on pediatricians to discuss oral hygiene and perform oral health screenings during well-child visits. Fluoridated toothpaste should be promoted in all indigenous and other high-risk children after the first tooth has erupted.

Children also should have access to fluoride varnish, which can be applied by a trained health worker or even a lay child care worker. "Applying varnish is very simple to do, and doesn't hurt at all. ... Studies indicate fluoride varnish can reduce the risk of early childhood caries by 35%-40%," Dr. Holve said.

While the policy calls for more research on the epidemiology, prevention, management and microbiology of ECC, Dr. Holve is optimistic that the troubling statistics on oral health in native children can be improved. He hopes the statement will shed light on the overall oral health disparity for native children and prompt additional attention on reducing that gap in oral health.

RESOURCE

Oral Health Risk Assessment: Training for Pediatricians and Other Child Health Professionals provides a concise overview of how to perform an oral examination and conduct an oral health risk assessment and triage for infants and young children. Access the training at www.aap.org/commpeps/dochs/oralhealth/ohra-cme.cfm.

Dental disease in indigenous communities prompts joint policy to expand oral health interventions

Jessica Pupillo

AAP News 2011;32;19

DOI: 10.1542/aapnews.2011326-19

Updated Information & Services

including high-resolution figures, can be found at:
<http://aapnews.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/32/6/19>

Related Articles

A related article has been published:
<http://aapnews.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/32/6/14>

Permissions & Licensing

Information about reproducing this article in parts (figures, tables) or in its entirety can be found online at:
<http://aapnews.aappublications.org/misc/Permissions.shtml>

Reprints

Information about ordering reprints can be found online:
<http://aapnews.aappublications.org/misc/reprints.shtml>

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

