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## **News Release**

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## **CHILDREN'S DENTAL HEALTH MONTH FINDS TOO MANY YOUTH STILL SUFFERING FROM TOO MUCH DENTAL DISEASE**

February 2004 is Children's Dental Health Month, a good time to reflect on the continuing high rate of dental disease in the nation's uninsured and under-privileged children.

"Children's dental problems persist despite most oral diseases being preventable," said Burton L. Edelstein, DDS, MPH, founding director of the Children's Dental Health Project. "Dental disease is 5 times more common in children than asthma, and remains the most common chronic disease among children," he continued.

Pediatric dental problems ranging from crooked teeth to severe cavities are common in the US despite improvements for many children. According to the Surgeon General's Report on Oral Health in America, a fifth of America's preschoolers and half of second graders have experienced cavities. But with 80 percent of tooth decay concentrated in only 25 percent of children, it is possible to target public efforts to those with the greatest needs.

Recognition of the social consequences of poor dental health is not limited to government reports, however. A January 18, 2004 New York Times Magazine article by David Shipler titled "A Poor Cousin of the Middle Class," made this correlation between the working poor and oral health: "If Caroline were not poor, she would not have lost her teeth, and if she had not lost her teeth, perhaps she would not have remained poor" (New York Times, January 18, 2004).

Organizations interested in covering the current state of children's oral health in America can find extensive resources on the **Children's Dental Health Project** website, including up-to-date issue briefs on Medicaid, SCHIP and children's oral health access. Visit the home page at [www.cdhp.org](http://www.cdhp.org) for direct links to these briefs and other new publications including a Handbook created to help community health centers expand dental services by contracting with private practice dentists (*Increasing Access to Dental Care Through Public/Private Partnerships: Contracting Between Private Dentists and Federally Qualified Health Centers*).

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The **American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry**'s 5,600 members serve as primary care providers for millions of children from infancy through adolescence; providing advanced, specialty-level care for infants, children, adolescents, and patients with special health care needs in private offices, clinics, and hospital settings. [www.aapd.org/](http://www.aapd.org/)

The **American Dental Association** published *State Innovations to Improve Access to Oral Health Care for Low-Income Children: A Compendium* in late 2003. The report was developed to record the activities states have pursued in an effort to improve access to oral health care for children enrolled in Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program. <http://www.prnewswire.com/mnr/ada/11207/#>

The **National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center** (<http://www.mchoralhealth.org/>) collaborates with federal, state, and local agencies; national and state organizations and associations; and foundations to gather, develop, and share quality and valued information and materials.

*The Children's Dental Health Project of Washington DC is a research and advocacy agency that works with policymakers to improve children's oral health and increase access to dental care.*