

“Welcome Baby Teeth”

“Welcome Baby Teeth” was initiated by the Anderson Center for Dental Care of Children’s Hospital to address the leading infectious disease of our children, early childhood cavities. Funded by the First 5 Commission of San Diego through California’s Proposition 10, the program is a pediatric, physician-based, early intervention with the essential aim of changing the existing paradigm from reactive, costly treatment, to disease prevention.

Recent Findings

Oral health screenings conducted in San Diego County by the Anderson Center have found that 33% of preschool children screened have some form of decay, with poor and minority children having 5 times more untreated decay than children from higher income families. As many as 80,000 children ages 1-5 in this county may have early childhood cavities (ECC), which can cause failure to thrive, and may impact speech, nutrition, and overall health. Research also indicates that 86% of parents take their preschoolers to the pediatrician up to 10 times before age 5, while less than 50% take them to a dentist.

Oral Health Screening, Education and Referral

In light of this knowledge, efforts are underway through “Welcome Baby Teeth” to establish pediatric primary care as the first line of defense for ECC. Over 150 pediatric providers have been recruited and are conducting a 30-second Lift-the-Lip oral screening for their patients beginning at the 1-year well-child check-up. Educational materials and toothbrushes are supplied for them to distribute to parents, and an enhanced referral system is in place to encourage parents to take children as early as age 1 for a well-child dental visit.

Care Coordination

Recognizing that screening will reveal children in need of urgent dental treatment, the Anderson Center for Dental Care is assisting primary practices by providing care coordination for these children. Counselors work diligently with each family, one-on-one, to assist in accessing dental care for their children. Through private insurance, Denti-Cal, Healthy Families or helping them to apply for alternative funding, options are developed to secure dental treatment for each child with urgent needs.

Pediatric Primary Care Providers Are Key

Recent studies have found that 90% of pediatric primary care providers agree that they have an important role in identifying dental problems and educating families in the prevention of tooth decay. By enabling physicians to increase their role in oral health through training, support, systems improvement, and relationship building with children’s dentists, “Welcome Baby Teeth” helps physicians develop “best practices” in comprehensive health assessment and treatment for their patients.

To enhance your practice through this simple approach to dental disease prevention, pediatric providers are invited to call Jan Ferree at the Anderson Center, (858) 576-1700 x 4802.