



# Oral Health Care Measures

## Preventive Dental Care Study

Delta Dental is dedicated to advancing oral health for all Americans, which includes sharing knowledge and meaningful insights on national oral health trends. As the nation's leading dental benefits provider, Delta Dental has one of the largest national claims data sets on oral care.

Each year, Delta Dental analyzes the preventive dental care services utilized by Delta Dental commercial\* members across the country (in an anonymized aggregate form). The findings are published in an annual Preventive Dental Care Study to identify trends in preventive and diagnostic care delivery. Delta Dental companies can use these findings to enhance and develop their disease management initiatives and identify populations at the highest risk of developing oral disease.

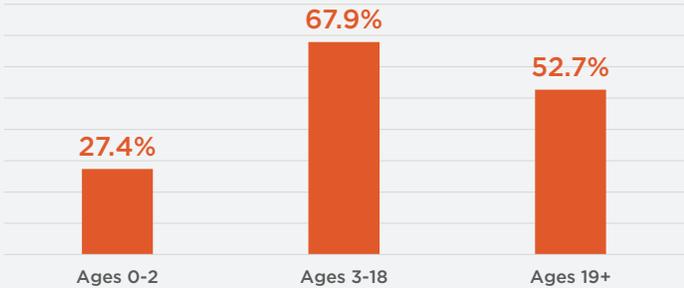
**This year's study noted four positive observations:**

- 76.5% of at-risk adults for caries *did* have at least one oral evaluation
- The percentage of at-risk adults for caries has been slowly *declining* over time, indicating an overall improvement in health
- A two-percentage point improvement in the number of *at-risk* children receiving two or more fluoride treatments
- A seven-percentage point increase in *non-risk* children receiving two or more fluoride treatments

### Established Dental Home measure

This year, Delta Dental introduced the "Established Dental Home" measure to capture the percentage of Delta Dental members of all ages that had an oral evaluation in the preceding 12-month period. Having a dental home is a critical element of activating patient-centered care and improving oral and overall health.

 **55%** of Delta Dental members of all ages have an established dental home.



**Percentage of Delta Dental members with an oral evaluation — by age group**

The two age groups with the lowest utilization of oral evaluations are **children 0-2** and **young adults**. It's not completely surprising that young adults who may be busy establishing their careers and families find it more difficult to find time to maintain their regular dental appointments, but it's no less important than for all age groups.

\*Does not include Medicaid and CHIP program claims

## Additional findings

There has been a significant increase in the number of children receiving the recommended two or more fluoride treatments. However, most children (ages 1-18) at risk for dental decay are not receiving recommended fluoride and sealant treatments.

### Child prevention: fluoride treatment

Despite fluoride applications being covered by their Delta Dental benefit plan, children at higher risk for dental caries are not getting the recommended care.



**62%** of at-risk children (ages 1-18) **did not** get the recommended two fluoride treatments, but there has been consistent improvements in this measure since the significant drop in 2020 and have now returned to pre-COVID levels.

### Child prevention: sealants

Despite sealants being covered by their Delta Dental benefit plan, many children at-risk for caries are not getting the recommended preventive care. The most notable gap in care among this group is the difference between first molar and second molar results.



About **5 in 10** at-risk children **did not** get a sealant placed on at least one permanent first molar by age 10.



**73%** of 15-year-old members at risk **had not** received a sealant on at least one permanent second molar.

### Child prevention: utilization of dental services

Only **29%** of children under age 3 visited a dentist in 2023.



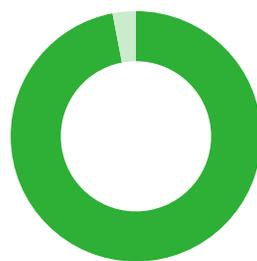
Many children do not see the dentist for the first time before age 3. This is concerning as it is **recommended** that children receive their **first dental evaluation by age 1**.

Conversely, **73%** of children aged 3-18, visited a dentist in 2023.



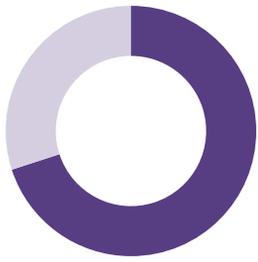
### Child prevention: caries risk documentation

**97%** of children ages 0-20 **did not** have caries risk documentation reported on a claim. This was a new measure added in 2022.



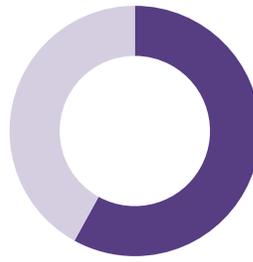
**There are gaps in care that could help target research more effectively.** Most dentists are not reporting caries risk documentation.

### Adult prevention: risk of dental caries



**77%** adults (age 19+) at risk for caries **did** have at least one evaluation in 2023.

### Adult prevention: periodontal disease prevention



**58%** of adults (age 30+) at risk for periodontal disease **did** have at least two cleanings.

## Delta Dental recommended preventive dental care services



- Children should have their **first oral evaluation** by **age one**
- **Children ages 1-18** should get at least **two fluoride treatments** per year, especially those at higher risk of developing caries
- **Children ages 6-14** should have **sealants applied** to their molar teeth during these cavity prone years
- **Adults at high risk** for periodontal disease should have at least **two cleanings per year**

## Conclusion

Preventive dental care is a vital aspect of overall health and helps reduce the occurrence of serious oral diseases, improve related health conditions, address health care disparities, and lower overall health care costs.

The data in this study highlights areas where improvements can be made to interventions and research, such as:

- Addressing the challenges for patients of all ages to receive the recommended preventive dental care, especially with older teens (age 15+) and younger children (under age 3)
- Breaking down barriers for adults to receive preventive oral health care, especially in certain high-risk populations
- Improving utilization of oral evaluations, particularly in young children ages 0-2
- Increasing the percentage of dentists documenting caries risk for children

As the nation's oral health leader, Delta Dental remains committed to closing these care gaps and collaborating with partners across the health care system to innovate and enhance access to preventive dental care.

## Methodology

Data: De-identified, aggregate Delta Dental commercial plan data (does not include Medicaid and CHIP program claims) representative of all 50 states, DC, and Puerto Rico from 2010 - 2023 (Some measures have changed slightly over the years, so trending data may not be available, and those measures are noted in the study).

### **Key measures tracked:**

#### *Child prevention: fluoride treatment*

- Percentage at risk for caries; at-risk w/ 2+ fluoride treatments (age 1-18)
- No risk: Percentage w/ 2+ fluoride treatments (age 1-20)

#### *Children prevention: sealants*

- On First Molars (by age 10): Percentage w/ 1+ sealant; with all 4 molars sealed
- On Second Molars (by age 15): Percentage w/ 1+ sealant; with 1/ all 4 molars sealed

#### *Periodontal disease prevention (Age 30+)*

- Percentage w/ past periodontal treatment; with past periodontal treatment + 2+ dental cleanings

#### *Adult prevention (age 19+)*

- Percentage at high risk for dental caries; high-risk w/ 1+ evaluations

#### *Child utilization of services*

- Age < 3 Percentage w/ any dental service
- Age 3-18 Percentage w/ any dental service
- Age 19+ Percentage w/ any dental service

#### *Established dental home with 1+ evaluations*

- Age < 3 Percentage w/ oral evaluation
- Age < 3 Percentage w/ D0145 evaluation
- Age 3-18 Percentage w/ oral evaluation
- Age 19+ Percentage w/ oral evaluation

#### *Cost of dental services per month*

- Per member, per month cost (Ages 0-18)

#### *Caries risk documentation (Ages 0-20)*

*Limitations:* Data includes only Delta Dental commercial claims and is not necessarily representative of all commercial dental insurance plans.