

## Maternal and Child Health

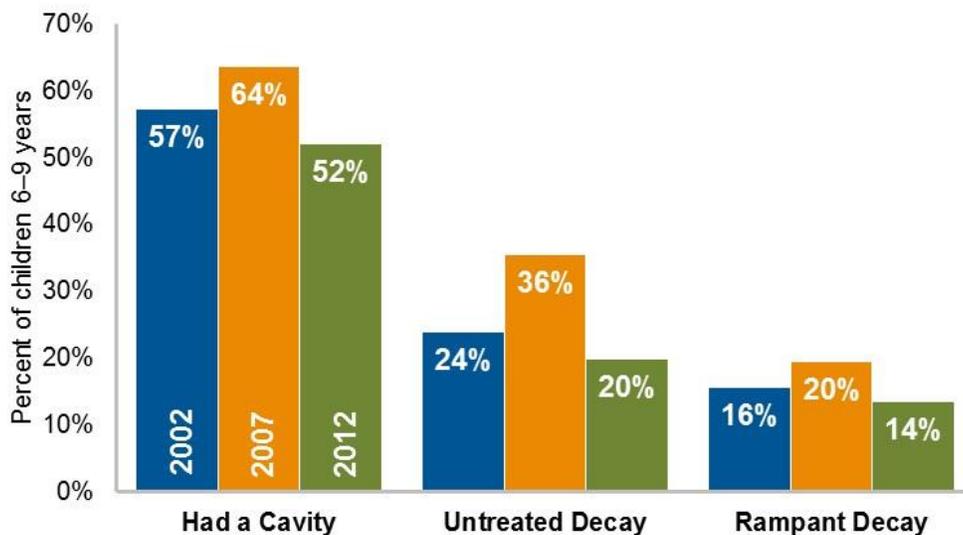
# Tooth decay

Despite being preventable, tooth decay (cavities) is one of the most common oral health conditions of childhood in the United States. Tooth decay in children may cause pain and lead to infection. Left untreated, tooth decay often has serious consequences that can negatively affect a child’s development and school performance. It can lead to diminished growth, social development, nutrition, speech development, and overall general health. Children with poor oral health have worse academic performance and are nearly three times more likely to miss school as a result of dental pain<sup>1</sup>. Over time, dental decay can become severe enough to require costly emergency treatment.

The oral health of Oregon’s school-age children worsened between 2002 and 2007 when the prevalence of cavities, untreated tooth decay and rampant decay all increased in children 6 to 9 years old (Figure 1). In 2012 there were improvements in all three measures, showing rates similar to those seen in 2002.

FIGURE 1

**Oral health status of children 6–9 years old, Oregon, 2002, 2007 & 2012**



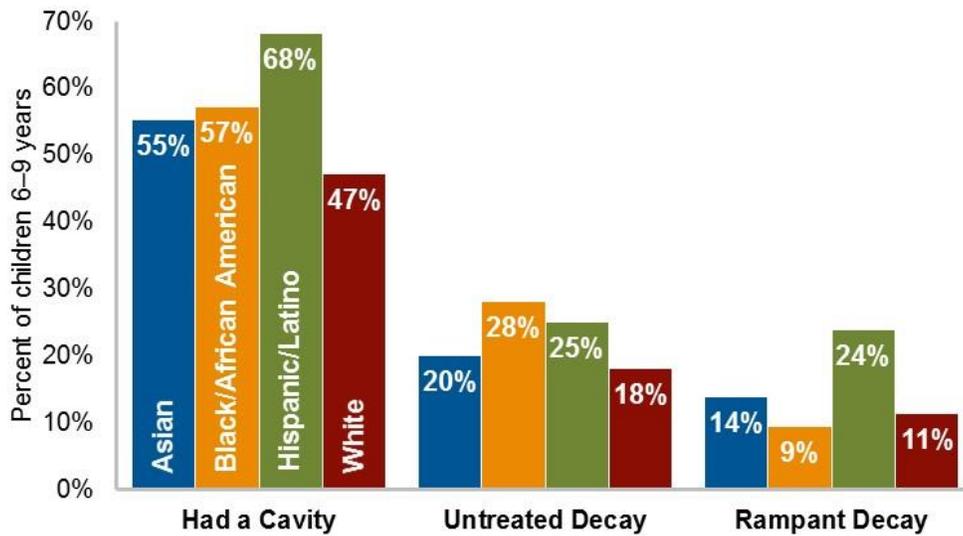
Source: Oregon Smile Survey, 2002, 2007 and 2012

<sup>1</sup> Jackson SL, VannWilliam F Jr, Kotch JB, Pahel BT, Lee JY. Impact of poor oral health on children’s school attendance and performance. American Journal of Public Health. 2011;101(10):1900-1906.

While improvements generally have been made between 2007 and 2012, there are substantial disparities in oral health for Oregon’s children based on geographic residence, household income, and race and ethnicity. Hispanic/Latino children have substantially higher rates of cavities, untreated decay, and rampant decay compared to white children, while Black/African American children have higher rates of untreated decay (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2

**Oral health status of children 6–9 years old by race/ethnicity, Oregon, 2012**



Source: Oregon Smile Survey 2012

Concerted efforts, including limiting consumption of sugary drinks and snacks, improving oral hygiene, screening for and treatment of decay, increasing preventive interventions such as dental sealants and fluoride varnish, and water fluoridation are needed to address this important public health issue.

**Additional Resources:** [Oregon Smile Survey, 2012 Report](#)

**About the Data:** Data source is the Oregon Smile Survey which is done every five years (2002, 2007 and 2012). Trained dental hygienists screen children in 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades from a statewide representative sample of elementary schools in Oregon. Oral screening includes: 1) any cavities in primary or permanent teeth that are treated or untreated (health status); 2) untreated tooth decay in primary or permanent teeth (access); 3) decay in >7 teeth that is treated or untreated (severity).

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