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## **Minnesota leads the nation in tracking oral health**

### **Statewide data source shows link between poverty and lack of dental care**

The Minnesota Department of Health and Delta Dental of Minnesota Foundation have launched a new one-stop source for oral health data known as the Minnesota Oral Health Statistics System.

This is one of the few online state oral health tracking systems in the country. Minnesota is the first state offering an interactive tool that allows for a variety of data queries, tables and charts and maps. The tracking system is made possible by a collaboration between the Minnesota Department of Health's Oral Health Program and funding partner, Delta Dental of Minnesota Foundation. The launch coincides with February's National Children's Dental Health Month.

"This private-public partnership puts Minnesota at the forefront of oral health," said Commissioner of Health Ed Ehlinger. "It is already helping to inform MDH's efforts to ensure that every child in Minnesota regardless of race or place has the opportunity for a healthy smile and a healthy start."

The online portal significantly improves access to data affecting the oral health of Minnesotans. It also links oral disease data to other chronic diseases and factors such as income, race, education, and access to dental care. Anyone with an internet connection can find and compare state and county level oral health data, including children's dental service use and dental sealant rates.

Recent data showed:

- Third graders enrolled in Minnesota public schools with higher poverty rates are more likely to have untreated and treated tooth decay, and more likely to have urgent treatment needs.
- About half of Minnesotans 65 years or older earning less than \$35,000 a year have suffered tooth loss compared to only 26 percent of seniors earning \$50,000 or more.
- Nearly six out of every 10 older adults in Minnesota with less than a high school degree had at least one natural tooth removed due to tooth decay or gum disease compared to two of every 10 older adults with a college degree.

- Less than half of Minnesota children under 20 years old enrolled in Medicaid/Minnesota Health Care Programs had a paid dental claim (i.e. saw a dentist or oral health provider in the past year), and fewer than 40 percent had a preventive dental service claim, such as for a dental cleaning or exam.
- Less than 20 percent of Minnesota Health Care Programs enrollees ages six to 14 years received dental sealants per recommendation by the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry for their age group.
- Among Minnesota third graders enrolled in public school, 67 percent of white children have dental sealants compared to 49 percent of Hispanic/Latino children.

These striking oral health disparities provide evidence that Minnesota children and older adults, and in particular low-income families, need special consideration in programming and policy.

"To solve a problem, first you need to know the facts," said Susan Hammel, Executive Director of the Delta Dental of Minnesota Foundation and Community Affairs. "Those passionate about finding public policy solutions to improve health through oral health for all Minnesotans will find useful data in the new website."

You can find the Minnesota Oral Health Statistics System at the Minnesota Public Health Data Access Portal at <https://apps.health.state.mn.us/mndata/oral-health> and is available through the Oral Health topic link. The Minnesota Public Health Data Access Portal is a product of the Minnesota Environmental Public Health Tracking Program under a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Tracking Network.

#### **About the Delta Dental of Minnesota Foundation:**

Delta Dental of Minnesota Foundation supports Delta Dental of Minnesota's mission of improving the oral health of the people in Minnesota. The Delta Dental of Minnesota Foundation supports initiatives that promote access to oral health for the underserved, especially in rural areas and for people living with low incomes across the state.

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