

# 1 in 5 americans has untreated cavities: CDC

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Most kids get dental care, regardless of income, because of federal health programs, researcher says

(HealthDay) -- More than one in every five Americans has untreated cavities, a new government report shows.

"Untreated tooth decay is prevalent in the U.S." said report co-author Dr. Bruce Dye, an [epidemiologist](#) at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics. "It appears that we haven't been able to make any significant strides during the last decade to reduce untreated cavities."

One expert was not surprised by the findings.

"This is information that has been known for a while," said Dr. Lindsay Robinson, a spokeswoman for the [American Dental Association](#). "More

people are on Medicaid and more and more states, in an attempt to balance their budgets, have eliminated dental benefits."

There needs to be more investment in dental care to cover those who rely on Medicaid, Robinson said. "Only about 2 percent of Medicaid dollars go to dental care. In the private system it's triple that," she explained.

"Even people with dental benefits are afraid of any extra out-of-pocket costs," Robinson added.

The report authors found that the rate of cavities was pretty steady among all age groups, with teenagers having the lowest prevalence, Dye said. Among kids aged 5 to 11, 20 percent had untreated cavities, while 13 percent of those aged 12 to 19 had untreated cavities. People aged 20 to 44 had the highest rate of untreated cavities, at 25 percent.

Usually there is a difference in income when it comes to health care, but in this case children were getting about the same [dental care](#) regardless of family income, Dye noted.

For poorer children, this is most likely due to [government programs](#) such as Medicaid and CHIPS (Children's Health Insurance Program), Dye said. Among adults, the poor have a rate of untreated [dental problems](#) twice that of others, he noted.

In addition to having cavities that were not treated, 75 percent of Americans have had some sort of dental work.

Other findings in the report include:

- Among children and adolescents, 27 percent had at least one dental sealant. In that age group, 30 percent of whites had

sealants, compared to 23 percent of Mexican-Americans and 17 percent of blacks.

- Among blacks, 38 percent had all of their teeth, compared with 51 percent of whites and 52 percent of Mexican-Americans.
- Among those aged 65 and older, 23 percent had no teeth, but most likely had dentures.

To reduce the odds of developing cavities, Dye recommended brushing and flossing daily and going to the dentist at least once a year. In addition, cutting down on sweets and surgery drinks and eating a healthy diet can also help, he said.

Going to the dentist is important, Robinson agreed. When problems are caught and treated early, it saves money, and for people with chronic diseases such as diabetes it can help avoid hospitalizations, she added.

"It is possible to not get [cavities](#)," Robinson said. "It's amazing how many people think it's just going to happen."

**More information:** For more on dental health, visit the [U.S. National Library of Medicine](#).

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