

NOVA SCOTIA ORAL HEALTH REPORT

FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS:

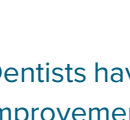
CHILDREN'S ORAL HEALTH IN NOVA SCOTIA



NOVA SCOTIA DENTISTS KNOW THAT PREVENTING DENTAL DISEASE

IS KEY TO CHILDREN'S LONG-TERM ORAL HEALTH.

Unfortunately, they also know the provincial Children's Oral Health Program isn't doing all that it could to look after children's long-term oral health. The program simply isn't working as well as it could.



The Children's Oral Health Program provides limited basic dental care to all children up to age 15.

Dentists have been advocating for changes to the program for a long time. Some improvements to the program have been made over the years, but dentists know it can work much better for everyone involved—patients, parents, and providers.



Dentists want to work with government to:

- Improve the Children's Oral Health Program
- Increase access to fluoride (and its cavity-fighting benefits) across Nova Scotia

Together, we can help protect children's oral health for years to come.

WHY DOES THE CHILDREN'S ORAL HEALTH PROGRAM NEED TO CHANGE?

The number of children accessing program services each year is declining. From 2015/16 to 2019/20, the number of children receiving care under the program has declined by approximately 5% each year.¹

Less than half of eligible children access program services. In 2019/20, only 36% of eligible children received care under the program.²

The program prioritizes fixing dental decay instead of preventing it. It includes unlimited fillings, but places limits on preventative services, such as regular dental cleanings, exams, x-rays, and fluoride treatments.³

Too many children in the province experience prolonged wait times for care with private practice pediatric specialists or at IWK Health. Many suffer from dental pain as they wait. We need to focus on prevention so fewer children end up on waitlists in the first place, and those who do, don't wait as long.

It's not clear if children who need the program most are using it or if it leads to better long-term oral health for those who do. The program has existed for decades, but these outcomes are not measured by government. We need to be sure more services are provided to children who need them most.

The government program budget has not kept pace with rising costs.

The program is complicated and is often poorly understood.

WHY DOES NOVA SCOTIA NEED A FLUORIDE STRATEGY?

Early childhood tooth decay is a very common oral disease.

It can begin soon after a baby's first tooth comes in.

If not prevented, early childhood tooth decay can cause pain and disrupt eating, sleeping, proper growth, and the ability to socialize, concentrate, and learn.⁴ It can result in time missed from school, increased emergency room visits for pain and infection, and more costly dental treatment. It can have a serious impact on a child's overall health.

Nova Scotia needs a provincial fluoride strategy to help prevent tooth decay. All Nova Scotian children should benefit from fluoride's cavity-fighting abilities.



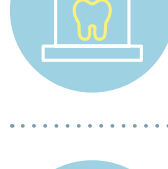
Fluoride provides many dental benefits whether it's in your toothpaste, applied during a dental visit, or in the water you drink.



Access to fluoridated drinking water is a proven way to help prevent early childhood tooth decay. It is safe and added to water systems in controlled amounts.



Community water fluoridation is supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Health Canada, and the Canadian Dental Association.



It is an accessible, cost-effective way to help prevent tooth decay for all members of the community.



63% of Nova Scotians surveyed support a provincial fluoride strategy that helps fund the addition of fluoride to water systems in Nova Scotia communities.⁵



53% of Nova Scotians surveyed support a provincial fluoride strategy that prevents municipalities with fluoride in their water systems from removing it.⁶

DENTISTRY'S RECOMMENDATIONS

THE NOVA SCOTIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION WANTS TO

COLLABORATE WITH GOVERNMENT TO:

Revisit recommendations from the province's Oral Health Advisory Group 2015 report.

The NSDA was a key stakeholder to the government's Oral Health Advisory Group which advocated for major changes to the Children's Oral Health Program. The report included recommendations, such as implementing changes to the Children's Oral Health Program so it focuses more on preventing dental disease, and serving the children who need the program most.

Create a province-wide policy with municipalities to support community water fluoridation.

This policy would include preventing communities with existing water fluoridation systems from removing them.

References

¹ Medical Services Insurance R70-Annual Statistical Tables (Sept. 2020), Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness: https://novascotia.ca/dhw/publications/annual-statistical-reports/DHW_Annual_Stats_Report_MSI_2019_20.pdf p.30

² Medical Services Insurance R70-Annual Statistical Tables (Sept. 2020), Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness: https://novascotia.ca/dhw/publications/annual-statistical-reports/DHW_Annual_Stats_Report_MSI_2019_20.pdf p.30

³ Children's Oral Health Program, Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness: <https://novascotia.ca/dhw/dental-programs/children-oral-health-program.asp>

⁴ CDA Position on Early Childhood Caries: https://www.cda-adc.ca/en/about/position_statements/ecc/

⁵ Narrative Research, The Atlantic Quarterly® Autumn 2021 (NSDA Commissioned Questions), Nov. 2021.

⁶ Narrative Research, The Atlantic Quarterly® Autumn 2021 (NSDA Commissioned Questions), Nov. 2021.

TIPS FOR CHILDREN'S ORAL HEALTH AT HOME

— 1 —

Children should have their first dentist visit within six months of their first tooth appearing or by age 1.

— 2 —

Brush children's teeth twice daily—specifically before bedtime—and floss once a day. Your dentist can recommend the proper amount of toothpaste to use. Before teeth come in, wipe their mouth with a clean, damp washcloth.

— 3 —

Limit sugary snacks and drinks. Fresh fruits and veggies, if available, and hard cheeses are tooth-friendly options.

— 4 —

Choose water to stay hydrated, especially between meals.

— 5 —

Build a good oral health routine together, including regular dentist visits, and lead by example.