

Children's Wisconsin dental clinics maintain safety net access to care for kids and families

Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease of childhood, despite the fact that it is largely preventable. In Wisconsin, one in three kids live with untreated tooth decay, and, if left untreated, this can affect a child's ability to eat, speak, sleep and learn, and take a toll on their self-esteem and desire to socialize. As with general and behavioral health, oral health status tends to vary based on socioeconomic factors. Children from families with lower incomes and children with special needs and disabilities experience more dental disease than children from families of higher income.

Access to care for underserved children has gotten even harder during the COVID-19 pandemic with many dental clinics across the Milwaukee area scaling back oral health services for vulnerable populations, including those covered by Medicaid. As a result, Children's Wisconsin has experienced a 200 percent increase in the number of children seeking to establish a dental home with us. In addition, Children's is one of the few hospitals allowing dentists to provide oral care in the operating room – more time in our operating room was allocated to dental cases during the pandemic to provide safe and compassionate care. We look forward to reducing emergency room visits for preventable dental issues for patients on the south side of Milwaukee when we open our Forest Home Clinic dental services next year.

By increasing access to preventative oral health care and educating kids and families about the behaviors that prevent dental disease, we can make a difference.

-Children's Wisconsin