Study: The Poorer the Children the More They Lack Dental Care

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Low-income children with public or Medicaid dental insurance coverage are less likely than those with private insurance to regularly visit the dentist, according to a new study published in *Health Affairs* and reported by HealthDay News.

For the study, researchers from the University of California and the California Healthcare Foundation examined data from a health survey of more than 11,300 children younger than 11 to determine the length between dental visits and whether their race and type of insurance affected care.

Of 10,805 children in the group with teeth, 45 percent had private coverage, about 37 percent had Medicaid or Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and 18 percent were uninsured.

Researchers found that 24 percent of the children had never seen a dentist, kids with public dental insurance had lengthier periods between visits, and that black and Latino children either had never seen a dentist or had visited one with more than six months falling in between.

The main reason for these disparities is that not enough dentists accept Medicad, said Nadereh Pourat, PhD, an associate professor of health services at the University of California at Los Angeles School of Public Health, and co-author of the study.

"Unlike the medical field, where many providers such as community clinics are available to see Medicaid patients, the dental care field is dominated by privately practicing dentists," Pourat said.

This leads to racial disparities in care as does having fewer Latino and black dentists in California, researchers added.

In addition, parents might also contribute to the problem because they don't realize the importance of early and regular dental visits, Pourat suggested.

To get kids the dental supervision they need, researchers recommended boosting Medicaid reimbursement for dental care, expanding pediatric care among general dentists and increasing training for dental students in the community.

Learn how to save costs on dental care here.

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