

## **Toothache More Likely to Strike Poor, Minority Kids: U.S. Study**

Equitable, universal dental care could help ease the disparity, researchers say

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By Robert Preidt

Poor, minority and special-needs kids in the United States are more likely than other children to be stricken with the pain of toothache, researchers report.

In their study, Dr. Charlotte Lewis and Dr. James Stout of the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle analyzed data from almost 87,000 children, aged 1 to 17 years, who took part in the 2007 National Survey of Children's Health.

The investigators found that about 10.7 percent of children had experienced a toothache in the previous six months. Toothache was most common among kids aged 6 to 12, affecting 14 percent of them in the past six months.

Black and multiracial children were significantly more likely to have suffered a toothache than white youngsters, even when the researchers factored in insurance and poverty status. The highest prevalence of toothache was noted among children from poor families. And compared with kids who either had private insurance or no insurance, kids who were covered by Medicaid were more likely to experience a toothache, according to the report.

The study authors also found that special needs children had a significantly higher prevalence of toothache when compared with kids without special needs.

"The prevalence of toothache, particularly among vulnerable groups who disproportionately experience it, serves to reinforce the importance of physician involvement in oral health and of efforts to better evaluate and improve our nation's oral health and dental care system," Lewis and Stout concluded. "Optimally, our nation's health care system would include equitable and universal dental care access so that all Americans could obtain preventive oral health care as well as timely diagnosis and treatment of dental disease."

The study findings are published in the November issue of the journal *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*.

SOURCE: *JAMA/Archives* journals, news release, Nov. 1, 2010