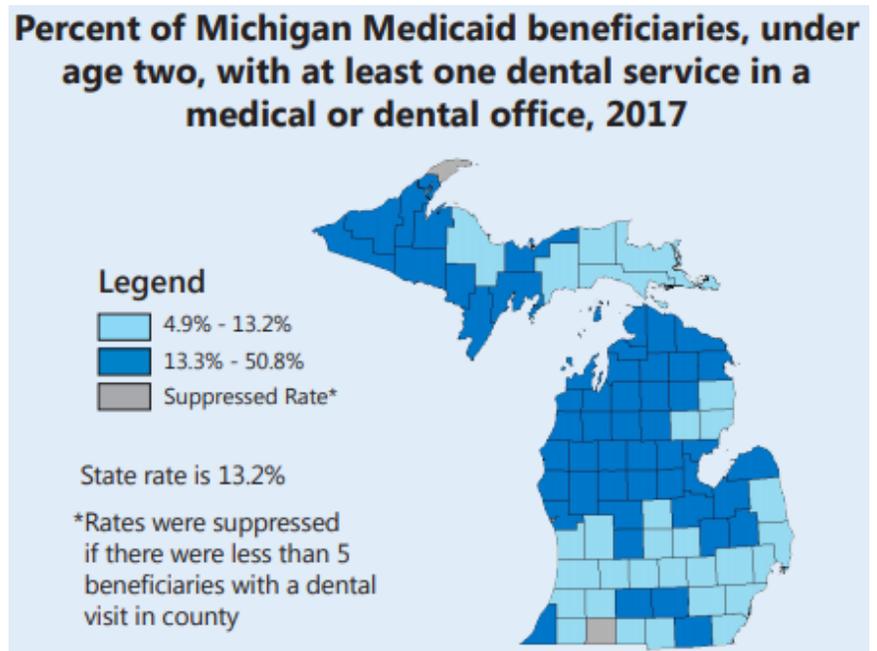


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## CHILDREN'S ORAL HEALTH AGE ONE DENTAL VISIT

At what age should children have their first dental visit? It might be younger than you think. According to the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) and the American Dental Association (ADA), children should see a dentist within six months after their first tooth comes in, or by age one. However, most children do not see a dentist until they are much older. In Livingston County, only 8.7% of children under the age of two and on Michigan Medicaid had at least one dental service in 2017 (this includes services provided by a physician or nurse). This is below the state rate of 13.2%. A delay in dental care can increase a child's risk of having tooth decay and other oral health problems. However, an age one oral health exam is simple, easy and effective. This *Road to Community Health* issue will cover the importance of caring for a child's oral health even before baby teeth appear, bringing your child to the dentist by their first birthday, and the benefits of establishing a dental home early in life.



### PROMOTING ORAL HEALTH FROM BIRTH

Even before baby teeth appear, steps can be taken to promote a child's oral health. First, parents of newborns can help protect their infant's oral health by taking care of their own teeth. This is because bacteria that cause dental caries can pass from a parent's mouth to their baby. Parents can reduce this risk by brushing twice a day, seeing a dentist every six months, not sharing eating utensils, and not cleaning off a pacifier in their mouth. Other ways to care for a baby's mouth include:



Wipe gums twice a day with a soft, clean cloth in the morning after feeding and before bed.



When teeth come in, brush twice daily with a soft, small-bristle toothbrush, water and a tiny amount of fluoride toothpaste.



When your baby starts eating solid food, choose healthy foods with no added sugar and avoid juice.



Visit the dentist by your baby's first birthday to detect any problems early.

## WHY START DENTAL VISITS AT AGE ONE

Parents may think that a child is too young or does not have enough teeth to visit a dentist by age one. However, baby teeth are vulnerable to tooth decay from their very first appearance. Children who wait to have their first dental visit until age two or three are more likely to have cavities or oral health problems, leading to discomfort for the child and costly treatment. One study found that children who have their first dental visit before age one have 40% lower dental costs in their first five years than children who do not. Children's baby teeth are important for lifelong oral health and should be kept in place until they are lost naturally. The age one dental visit is a great opportunity for parents to learn how to properly care for their children's teeth. Caring for baby teeth helps to establish good, life-long oral health habits such as brushing and flossing properly. Having healthy primary teeth is also important as it:

- Helps children chew properly to maintain good nutrition
- Facilitates speech development, including being able to learn to speak clearly
- Helps proper development of permanent teeth by saving space for them
- Promotes a healthy smile that increases children's confidence

## WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE AGE ONE DENTAL VISIT

The first dental visit is a chance for a child to meet the dentist in a friendly, non-threatening way and help them feel comfortable with a dental exam. The visit is usually short, lasting about 30 minutes. Some dentists may ask the parent to sit in the dental chair and hold their child during the exam. During the visit, the dentist will check the child's teeth for decay, examine the child's bite, assess if teeth are growing properly, and look for any potential problems with the jaw, gums, and oral tissues. If needed, the child may have a gentle cleaning. This includes polishing teeth and removing any plaque, tartar, and stains. The dentists will also provide education to parents and caregivers on basic oral health care for children and answer any questions. Topics discussed may include:

- Good oral hygiene practices for your child's teeth and gums
- Oral habits (thumb sucking, pacifier use, tongue thrusting)
- How to prevent accidents and trauma to the teeth
- Fluoride Needs
- Developmental milestones
- Teething
- Proper nutrition
- Cavity prevention
- Schedule of dental checkups

Just like adults, children should see the dentist every six months. This helps to build the child's comfort level and confidence with the dentist, and allows the dentist to monitor the development of teeth and treat any problems early on.

## WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE A DENTAL HOME

A "Dental Home" refers to an ongoing relationship between a dentist and the patient. This means that a child's dental care is managed in a comprehensive, coordinated, routine and patient-centered way. By establishing a Dental Home by age one, children can become comfortable with the dentist as well as familiar with the process of dental screening at an early age. This also allows the dentist to continuously monitor a child's oral development, provide on-going preventive care and treatment, and establish an overall oral health care foundation for life. Additionally, having a Dental Home assures appropriate referral to dental specialists when care cannot directly be provided within the Dental Home. Families that do not have a dental provider can ask their pediatrician to check their child's mouth and provide a dental referral.