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**Untreated tooth decay can cause students to miss school**

*Oklahoma Dental Association Encourages Parents to take Children to Dentist*

**Oklahoma City:** Statistics show that dental caries, the disease that causes tooth decay, is the most common chronic childhood disease in the United States, according to the American Dental Association (ADA)<sup>1</sup>. If left untreated dental decay can cause significant tooth pain and eating problems - all of which can prevent children from focusing in school. Early detection of tooth decay is vital so children’s teeth will remain healthy, thus reducing emergency visits to the dentist or ER, avoiding unnecessary pain and keeping treatment costs low.

“Untreated tooth decay may cause pain and infections that lead to problems with eating, speaking, playing and learning,” said Dr. Jana Winfree, Oklahoma State Department of Health Director of Dental Health Services. “By visiting a dentist, children can receive topical fluoride and sealants to prevent tooth decay. A small cavity can be detected early and treated before it becomes a stressful toothache. Regular dental visits are part of being a healthy person.”

According to the National Children’s Oral Health Foundation, more than 51 million school hours are lost each year due to dental disease, and an estimated 17 million children in America go without dental care. A shocking 59 percent of adolescents have decayed, missing or filled teeth.

Even though the statistics are alarming, there is hope. The good news is that unlike many other diseases, tooth decay is preventable. The Oklahoma Dental Association (ODA) is making an effort in reducing dental disease in Oklahoma children by educating parents on the importance of dental treatment and prevention.

<b><i>To keep children out of dental pain, the ADA offers parents the following tips:</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your child’s first dental visit should take place within six months after the first tooth appears, but no later than a child’s first birthday</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have children brush two minutes twice a day with fluoride toothpaste</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When your child has two teeth that touch, you should begin flossing</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss with your dentist about dental sealants for your child</li> </ul>

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<p><b><i>Eating a healthy diet plays a big part of children’s oral health. Below are nutrition tips from the ADA for parents:</i></b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fruits and vegetables are good choices for a healthy smile since they are high in water and fiber, which balance the sugars they contain and help to clean the teeth</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cheese, milk, plain yogurt and almonds are foods that may benefit tooth health thanks to their high amounts of calcium and other nutrients</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limit empty calorie foods such as candy, especially hard or sticky candies, as they can adhere to teeth and lead to tooth decay</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid between-meal snacking</li> </ul>

(1) Page three: [http://www.ada.org/~media/ADA/Public%20Programs/Files/bringing-disease-prevention-to-communities\\_adh.ashx](http://www.ada.org/~media/ADA/Public%20Programs/Files/bringing-disease-prevention-to-communities_adh.ashx)

**Editor’s Note:** For more information about healthy habits for children, please visit MouthHealthy.org, which features dental health topics for every age and stage of life. If you would like to contact an ODA/ADA member dentist about children’s oral health, please contact the ODA at 405.848.8873 or e-mail [ccanada@okda.org](mailto:ccanada@okda.org).

Reporters are invited to follow the ODA on Twitter @OklaDentalAssoc and Like the ODA on Facebook @Oklahoma Dental Association.

**The Oklahoma Dental Association**, founded in 1907, has a membership of more than 1,600 dentists. The Association was established to help foster an awareness of the obligations and responsibilities of the dental profession to society, to help advance the art and science of dentistry and to promote public health and health services in the State of Oklahoma. For more information, visit [www.okda.org](http://www.okda.org).

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