Oral Disease in Washington State

- Dental disease is the single most common chronic childhood disease — 5 times more common than asthma.¹
- Less than one-third of children from birth through age 5 enrolled in Washington’s Medical Assistance program visited a dentist in 2005.²
- Statewide, it is estimated that less than one percent of children under age three receive dental disease prevention services during well child visits.³, ⁴ On average, children visit a physician 8 times for well child visits before age three.
- More young children in Washington State experience dental decay as compared with their counterparts across the nation. In Washington, 59% of elementary school-age children have dental caries as compared to 52% nationally.⁵
- Forty-five% of low-income preschoolers (three-five year-olds) had tooth decay as compared with 28% of children aged two to five years nationally.⁶, ⁷ The rates of decay among Washington children are significantly higher than they were ten years ago.⁸
- Only 52% of the Washington state population lives in communities with fluoride-protected water.⁹
- Poor oral health of children has been related to poor performance in school, poor social relationships and less success in later life. If children are in pain, it distracts them from concentrating on schoolwork. Low- and moderate-income children miss a disproportionate amount of school due to oral disease.¹⁰
- Children with severe dental decay often need to be treated in a hospital operating room, costing about $3,500 to $4,000 per child.¹¹
- Poor oral health has been linked to diabetes, heart disease and other long-term health problems.¹
- More than 38 percent of all adults in the state have had teeth removed due to tooth decay or gum disease.¹²
- Nearly one-fifth of older adults – estimated to be 150,000 people in Washington – have untreated dental cavities.¹³
- In Washington, 20 percent of older adults have lost all of their teeth.¹⁴
- Twenty-five percent of adults 65 to 74 nationwide have severe periodontal (gum) disease. Gum disease has been linked to other serious health problems including diabetes, heart disease and strokes.¹⁵
- In 2007, 12 percent of Washington State’s population is over age 65. By 2030, adults 65 and older will be 20 percent of the population.¹⁶

Good Oral Health is a Necessity — Not a Luxury
Sources:

2. Washington State Medical Assistance Administration, Department of Social and Health Services, *Dental Services Utilization Report, Fiscal Year 2005.*
4. Washington State Medical Assistance Administration, Department of Social and Health Services, *Fluoride varnish applications by primary care providers, fiscal year 2005.*
6. Ibid.
11. Children’s Hospital and Regional Medical Center, personal communication with B. Williams, July 2003.