

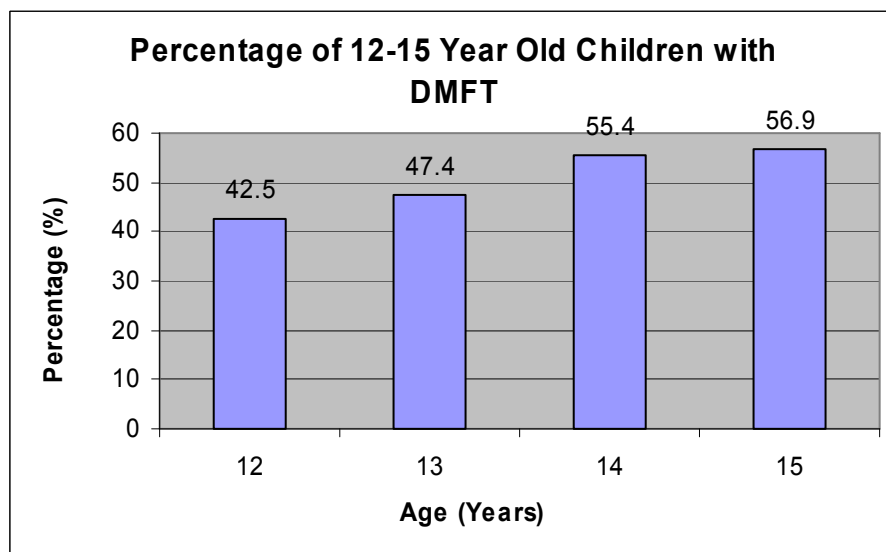
Dental Health of Australia's Teenagers and Pre-teen Children: The Child Dental Health Survey, Australia 2003-04

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has released a new report, *Dental health of Australia's teenagers and pre-teen children: The Child Dental Health Survey, Australia 2003-04*. The Child Dental Health Survey provides national information on the dental health of children attending school dental services in Australia, This survey represents the only data routinely collected by all states and territories on child dental health. The research examined the dental data of 250,000 children from all states and territories except New South Wales. The report showed that decay is relatively common in children and teenagers within Australia.

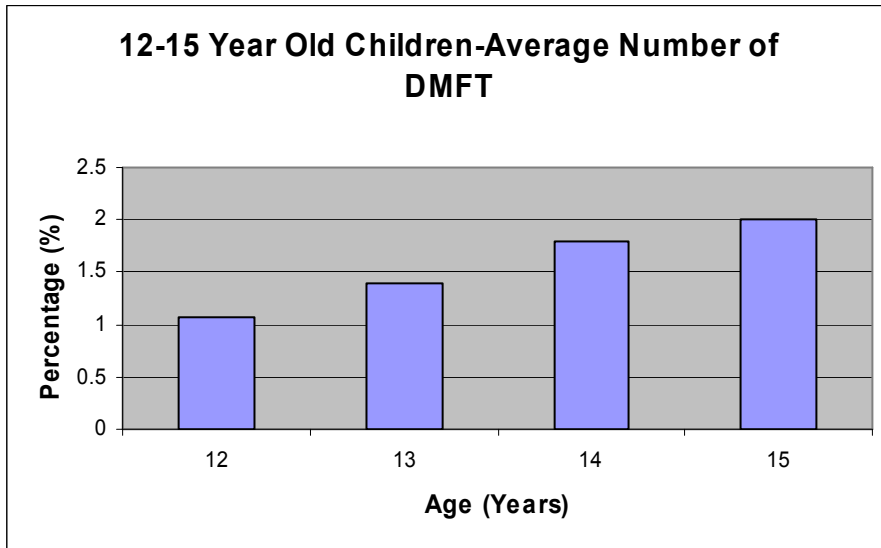
Statistics

Teenagers

- Between 40% and 57% of 12–15 year old teenagers had some history of decay in their permanent teeth—that is, one or more decayed, missing and filled permanent teeth (DMFT).



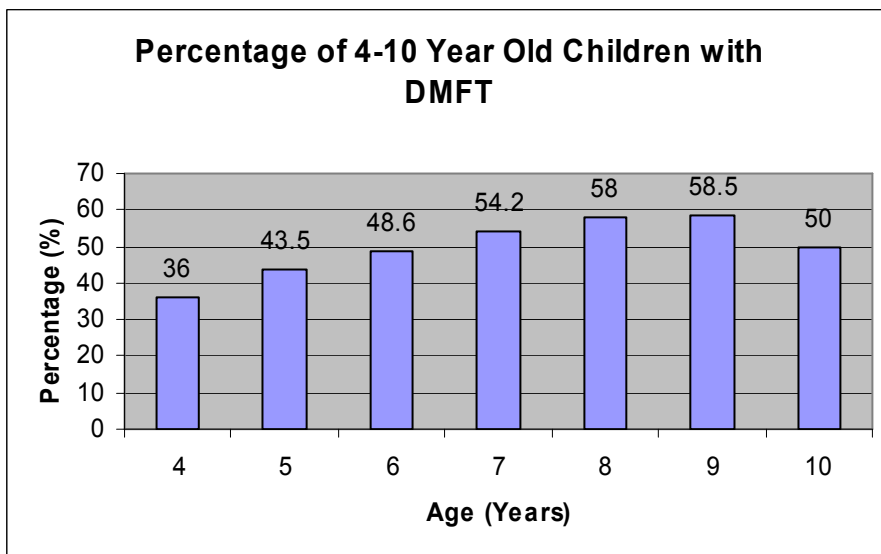
- On average 12 year old children had slightly more than one decayed, missing and filled permanent tooth per child, while 15 year old children had two decayed, missing and filled permanent teeth.



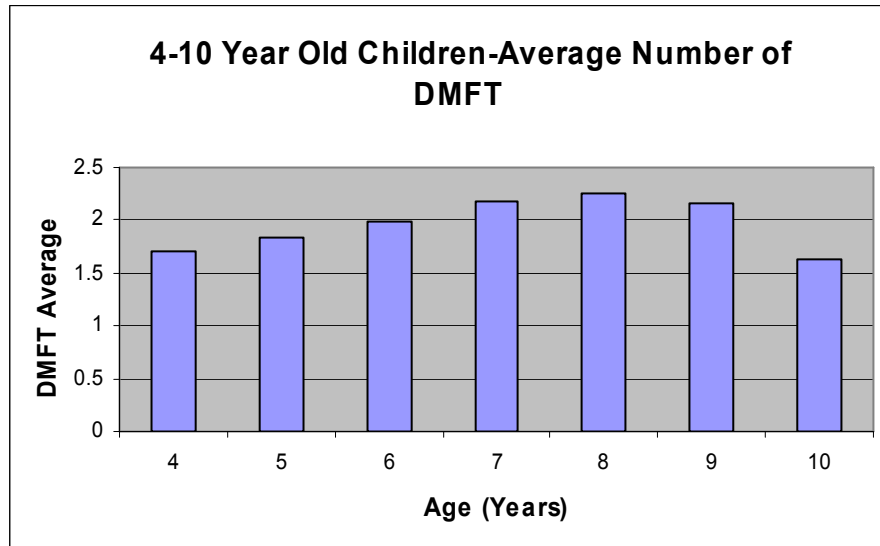
- The 10% of teenagers with the most extensive history of permanent tooth decay had between five and eight permanent teeth affected, which was about 4.5 times the national average of decayed, missing and filled teeth.

Pre-teen Children

- Nearly half (48.9%) of 6 year old children had a history of decay in the deciduous ('baby') teeth—that is, one or more decayed, missing and filled deciduous teeth.



- On average, 6 year old children had two decayed, missing and filled deciduous teeth per child.



- The 10% of 4–6 year old children with the most extensive history of deciduous tooth decay had more than nine deciduous teeth affected, which was about 4.5 times the national average.

Global Comparison

- A comparison of 12 year old DMFT (decayed, missing, and filled teeth) scores from 35 countries and 12 of the 30 OECD nations found that of those countries with available data, Australia has the equal eighth lowest percentage of 12 year old children with decay experience.

Why is Tooth Decay on the Rise?

The report pointed to an increased intake of acidic foods, including soft drinks, which dissolve the teeth. Fruit juice and soft drinks are high in sugar and acidity. These sugars eat away at the enamel that protects teeth, causing tooth decay. Inadequate brushing was also a major risk factor for decay.

Other reasons may include: changes in dietary patterns including less drinking of fluoridated mains water, increased snacking especially on processed foods with high sugar and carbohydrate content, an increase in sweetened beverage consumption (soft drinks, sports drinks, and acidic juices in baby bottles and sippy cups), lower consumption of fruits and vegetables and changes in school dental programs.

History of Children’s Dental Health

The ADA has previously called for an increase in funds to school dental services and supported the NHHRC recommendation for an increase in resources for children’s oral health. Following data from the 2002 Child Dental Health Survey, published in 2009, the ADA called for immediate action to curb the trend of increasing decay in children by keeping the dental therapist’s role to treating children and providing more resources to school dental services.

In 1973 the Australian School Dental Scheme was established to provide comprehensive dental treatment for all Australian school children up to the age of 15

years. Many of the services provided were by dental therapists who were specifically trained to provide treatments for children under the supervision of dentists. The creation of this program helped bring about significant improvement.

At a time when decay trends in children are now increasing, governments must focus attention on this area and maintain and/or expand school dental services. Investments here have worked previously, and will work again.

Oral health promotion campaigns can also be successful. The ADA's recent campaign entitled "Let's Talk Baby Teeth" gives parents and caregivers tips to help improve their child's oral health. Oral Health Week 2010 has "erosion" as its topic, targeting one of the factors identified by the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare's report.

Healthy Habits Start at Home

Changes can also take place at home. With the school year approaching, it's easy to start by providing nutritional foods in children's lunchboxes. This year, instead of giving your children juice for lunch, provide water instead. Water is the best and healthiest option for kids as it quenches thirst and prevents dehydration. In addition, set aside time to teach and assist younger children with brushing.

Teenagers can increase their oral health by taking part in the Medicare Teen Dental Plan, which entitles eligible teens to receive a preventative dental check from a dentist who is registered with Medicare Australia. Approximately 1.3 million teenagers are eligible each year.

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