



ORAL HEALTH KANSAS
ADVOCACY • PUBLIC AWARENESS • EDUCATION

Kansas' oral health score remains low

Oral Health Kansas is releasing a new report comparing Kansas' oral health grade to the nation's performance. This second Kansas Oral Health Report Card shows that our state is doing many things right, but that we have a long way to go to ensure that all Kansans are able to maintain their oral health. For the second year in a row, Kansas received a grade of C on a series of indicators.

New Indicators

In 2021, there were 13 indicators and this year there are 15. One was created by dividing third graders with tooth decay and third graders who received no dental care. Tooth decay and no dental care were a single indicator last year, however this year the category has been divided into two separate indicators. Oral Health Kansas also added youth soda consumption as an additional indicator. Soda consumption among youth is a concern because carbonated drinks have sugar and acid which can lead to tooth decay. The data is based on self-reported information from high school students.

2022 Grade Drops

Kansas received a C grade last year as well as this year, but the actual points went down from 2.07 to 1.93. (The grading scale is from 0-4; 4 being an "A"). This means that when it comes to dental care in Kansas, there is much room for improvement.

One of the reasons Kansas had a lower grade point this year than last year is because it received a D grade in the following indicators:

- a. Percentage of children ages 3-5 received preventive dental care visit
- b. Percentage of third graders that have dental sealants on permanent molars
- c. Percentage of Kansans that drink optimally fluoridated water (natural or adjusted)

Prevention is Key

Preventive dental visits for children should start after the first tooth appears because the early visit has the potential to provide guidance to parents on how to prevent oral diseases¹. The percentage of children ages 3-5 years old enrolled in KanCare has declined by 6% from previous year, resulting in a grade reduction from C to D. Less than 50% of the children enrolled in KanCare have visited a dentist, whereas the general population of children visiting a dentist is almost 80%. The caveat in the general population of children is that 1 in 2 third graders have at least one decayed tooth and 1 in 5 have at least one untreated decayed tooth. Cavities that are left untreated can cause discomfort and infections, which can make eating, speaking, playing, and learning difficult². As a result, it is important to educate parents and caregivers about the necessity of at home dental care and regular visits to the dentist. Dental sealants can also help to avoid cavities for a long period². Dental sealants, which are applied to the chewing surfaces of the back teeth, can prevent up to

80% of cavities. Thirty-six percent of the third graders have dental sealants applied on permanent molars.

Care for Adults

The state and national data for adults remains the same as previous year since there is no new data available. Each year approximately two thirds of Kansas adults visit the dentist. However, one third of older adults have lost 6 or more teeth due to tooth decay or gum disease. Oral health is important for overall health. Diabetes, heart disease, and stroke have all been linked to gum disease³. Gum disease also is linked to premature births and low birth weight in pregnant women³. Less than half of pregnant women who reside in Kansas have their teeth cleaned during pregnancy.

Kansas scored an A for needs being met in dental provider shortage areas when compared to national data. This is not cause for celebration, however, because 60% of dental needs in these provider shortage areas go unmet in our state.

Strategies to Improve

Oral Health Kansas has numerous strategies on our [website](#) that could help people maintain good oral health, including educational programs and consumer information. In 2022 Oral Health Kansas is leading an advocacy effort to extend dental benefits in KanCare to adults. Organizations can share their support by signing a [form](#). Individuals can share their stories about lack of access to dental care in Medicaid by contacting us at info@oralhealthkansas.org. KanCare needs to include a comprehensive dental benefit for adults so that more than two-thirds of adults can afford to see a dentist on a regular basis.

Stakeholders in Kansas must work together to develop ways to ensure that all children in the state receive timely and routine preventive treatment, and dental care. Additional areas that require collaboration are improving access to affordable dental care for pregnant women and older adults in Kansas.

We invite you to review all fifteen of the oral health indicators on the report card, as they each have a story to tell about the oral health of Kansas. Please join us in the fight to improve services, supports, and policies to increase access to optimal oral health for all Kansans.

About Oral Health Kansas

Oral Health Kansas is a statewide organization whose mission is to improve oral health in Kansas through advocacy, public awareness, and education. The organization is dedicated to promoting the importance of lifelong dental health by shaping policy and educating the public, so Kansans know that all mouths matter. Follow us on our [website](#), as well as [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

References:

¹ Michigan Health. <https://healthblog.uofmhealth.org/childrens-health/when-should-a-child-see-a-dentist-for-first-time>

² Centers for Disease and Prevention. (2021). <https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/basics/childrens-oral-health/index.html>

³ Healthy 2020. <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/leading-health-indicators/2020-lhi-topics/Oral-Health>