

## WEEKLY WEDNESDAY UPDATE

The Weekly Wednesday Update is our newsletter which we email every Wednesday with oral health, health and policy updates from around the state and nationally.

To view past issues [click here](#).

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or click here to sign up for our [Weekly Wednesday Update](#).



## House Appropriations Approves Rate Increase

Today the House Appropriations Committee voted to include \$6 million of state funds in the KDHE budget for the Medicaid dental rate increase. This increase was recommended by the House Social Services Budget Committee, and we are pleased the full Appropriations Committee agreed with the recommendation.

Countless advocates, consumers, and dentists have contacted legislators to request this increase, and it is clear the message is being heard. Thank you!

Last year the Legislature approved \$4 million in state funds for a rate increase. Those funds allowed KDHE to increase the many of the Medicaid dental rates significantly:

- Exams: 50%
- Cleanings: 35%
- X-rays and composite fillings: 20%
- All other codes 10%

As a result of the 2025 rate increase, at least 20 new providers have joined Medicaid, and the rate of providers leaving the Medicaid program has slowed. The increase is working and is helping to strengthen the Medicaid dental provider network. We are at a tipping point, and a second increase this year is vital to ensure providers take a second look at Medicaid and consider being a part of the program.

The fight for the rate increase is not over. When it's time for the next steps in this advocacy, we will reach out to you again for your help in contacting legislators. For now, if you contacted a member of the Kansas House of Representatives about the rate increase, thank them for supporting it. And we thank you for your help in raising the profile of this important issue.



## When a Person Resists Toothbrushing: Gentle Strategies That Help

Toothbrushing isn't always easy - especially people with disabilities and people who have sensory sensitivities, communication differences, anxiety, or past negative dental experiences. If you are a caregiver of someone who struggles with brushing, you're not alone - and you're not doing anything wrong.

The most important thing to remember is this:  
You are brushing *with them*, not *for them*.

These strategies are designed to support children and adults with IDD or Autism by reducing stress, honoring choice, and building trust. There will be smooth moments and challenging ones. Progress may be slow - and that's okay. Every small success matters.

### **Start With Yourself**

Before you begin, take a moment for *you*.

- Take a deep breath
- Stay calm - your tone and body language help build trust
- Be patient and kind

A calm helper helps create a calm experience.

### **Offer Choices Whenever Possible**

Choices give a sense of control and reduce resistance. Even small decisions can make a big difference.

Try offering options like:

- **Toothbrush:** green or blue
- **Type:** small manual, electric, or 3-sided
- **Toothpaste:** mint or bubblegum

There are many other strategies that are helpful. Click [here](#) for toothbrushing strategies from Pathways to Oral Health.



Use a tiny smear of fluoride toothpaste the size of a grain of rice, from the first tooth up to the third birthday.



A pea for me at age 3...and always with fluoride!

## How Much is Too Much?

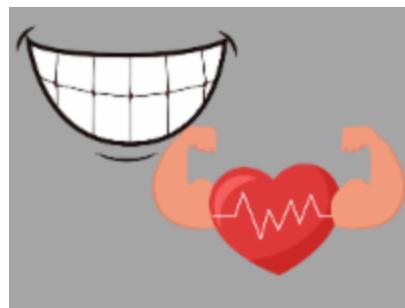
Throughout the month of February, we'll continue to share resources for Children's Dental Health Month. Today we'll talk about how much toothpaste is too much and is there such a thing? Yes! Let's not be wasteful but also, you really don't need that much toothpaste to get the job done,

when used correctly. When using too much toothpaste, you may think you're cleaning your teeth well but in reality, could be missing spots. Brush using gentle, circular motions.

Here is how much fluoride toothpaste to use:

- **Children under 3 years:** A rice-sized smear.
- **Children 3 and older** A pea-sized amount.

Children should be supervised while brushing until about the age of 8 and sometimes up until the age of 10 so you can ensure they're using the correct techniques and brushing for two minutes. Brushing your teeth together can make it a fun family time while creating good healthy habits. Listening to music or singing their favorite songs can help the time pass while brushing. Don't forget to floss!



## American Heart Month Awareness

February is American Heart Month. Our hearts and periodontal (gum) health are closely connected. Periodontal disease often begins with gingivitis, which causes red, swollen, or bleeding gums that can allow harmful bacteria to enter the bloodstream and could also cause tooth loss. This may trigger inflammation throughout the body, which has been linked to an increased risk of heart disease, including clogged arteries and heart complications.

In December 2025, the American Heart Association [released a new scientific statement](#), "Periodontal Disease and Atherosclerotic Cardiovascular Disease," which features new data supporting an association

between periodontal disease and atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease and updates the Association's 2012 scientific statement. A highlight from the study says:

■ Periodontal disease is a chronic inflammatory condition affecting over 40% of U.S. adults over age 30. The earliest stage is gingivitis (inflammation of the gums due to buildup of oral plaque). If left untreated, gingivitis may progress to periodontitis, where the gums begin to pull away from the teeth, forming small pockets that can trap bacteria and lead to infection. The most advanced stage, severe periodontitis, involves extensive damage to the bones supporting the teeth; teeth may become loose and fall out. This stage often requires surgical intervention.

The burden of severe periodontitis remains a public health concern in the U.S., emphasizing the need for targeted interventions in high-risk populations and regions, according to a study published in the February issue of The Journal of the American Dental Association. The cover story evaluated the burden of severe periodontitis in the U.S. from 1990 through 2021 and projected its trajectory through 2050. [Read more.](#)

Practicing good oral hygiene such as brushing twice a day, flossing daily, visiting the dentist regularly and eating healthy can help prevent periodontal disease and protect both your smile and overall health.



## Upcoming Events

- Course: An Introduction to Value-Based Care in Oral Health: Moving from Volume to Value, 1 CE. Click [here](#) for the course information.
- Self paced courses: [Providing Oral Health Care to Autistic Individuals](#) and [Caring for Individuals with Disabilities: Practical Considerations for Dental Providers](#).
- Save the date! The 2026 Conference on Oral Health will be Friday, November 13.



February is Black History Month and we look at Dr. Ida Gray Nelson, the first female, African American dentist. Dr. Ida Gray Nelson Rollins' life has taught us about resilience. Ida's mother passed away when she was a teenager and made Ida an orphan. She

moved to Ohio to live with her aunt. Due to financial constraints, Ida worked several jobs, including one as a dental assistant which led to her interest in dentistry. Where an African American woman had yet to graduate from dental school, Ida Gray earned acceptance, exemplary marks and a Doctoral of Dental Surgery at the University of Michigan. She went on to open her own



Picture courtesy of Wikipedia

dental practice in Chicago and mentored what would be the second in the line of female African American dentists in Chicago.



## Sugary Drink Display

We have Adult and Children's Sugary Drink Display's available for reservations. These displays are eye catching at exhibits, schools, library, dental offices, clinics and just about anywhere you see them! We only have a limited amount so please sign up soon if you're interested in reserving one. Click [here](#) to learn more about sugary drink display reservations!

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