Good oral health habits can benefit children with heart conditions



CAMP HILL, Pa. (Feb. 18, 2025) — Many children with heart problems face a host of challenges, including multiple surgeries, increased infection risk and ongoing medical issues. While not always top-of-mind, prioritizing their dental care can play an important role in their heart health.

Heart disease is a broad term encompassing heart abnormalities, either acquired at birth or later in life, that effect how it functions. Congenital heart disease, which occurs when the heart or adjoining blood vessels abnormally develop before birth, is its most common form — with nearly 40,000 babies affected in the United States each year. Heart problems can range in severity from small holes between chambers of the heart to major organ malformations like a missing valve.

In a 2024 Turkish study, the oral health status and needs of more than 300 children with heart disease were examined to find that 75.7% of the group had cavities, gum disease and plaque with a high need for dental care. This high rate of untreated dental decay and disease puts children at a higher risk for endocarditis, a serious infection of the heart's chambers and valves.

"Bacteria associated with plaque and gum disease can travel from the mouth to the heart, causing infective endocarditis," explains Roosevelt Allen, DDS, MAGD, ABGD, chief dental officer at United Concordia Dental. "This highlights the critical importance of proactive dental hygiene — brushing and flossing twice daily, and regular professional cleanings — for children with heart conditions to minimize this risk."

Another study concluded that Finnish children with more severe heart conditions experienced toothbrushing less frequently than children with no known medical conditions. It also revealed that parents who brushed their teeth twice a day were more likely to do the same for their children.

“Parents can really set the course for their children’s good dental care habits. The examples and routines set early on will have a lasting impact throughout the course of a child’s lifetime,” said Allen.

To help children stay invested in their oral health, view these 5 tips for making dental care fun. For more information on children’s oral health, visit the Wellness Resources section at UnitedConcordia.com. Sign up to get the latest company news.

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