Oral Health: At A Glance

Dental care is the **#1** unmet health need.

This is proven among low-income children, older adults, and those with special health care needs.

Louisiana has the sixth highest rate of oral cancer in the United States.

90% of Louisiana parishes suffer from Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas.

Tooth decay is the most common preventable childhood disease.

But, according to Well-Ahead’s Bright Smiles for Bright Futures Project, among Louisiana’s third graders:

- 56.4% had tooth decay
- 26.2% had untreated cavities
- 23.1% had to be referred to a dentist for further treatment

Did You Know?

Dental sealants are thin, plastic, protective coatings placed on the chewing surface of permanent teeth to prevent cavities.

Dental sealants prevent 80% of cavities in the back teeth, where 9 in 10 cavities occur!

HPSAs, or Health Professional Shortage Areas, are geographic areas and/or specific population groups within our state that are experiencing a shortage of dental care.

Fluoride, nature’s cavity fighter, is a mineral that occurs naturally on earth. All water contains some fluoride, but usually not enough to prevent tooth decay. Community Water Fluoridation (CWF) is the process of adjusting the amount of fluoride in public water supplies to prevent tooth decay. CWF is the most efficient, safe and cost-effective way to prevent tooth decay in communities.

Tooth decay is the most common preventable childhood disease.

But, according to Well-Ahead’s Bright Smiles for Bright Futures Project, among Louisiana’s third graders:

- 56.4% had tooth decay
- 26.2% had untreated cavities
- 23.1% had to be referred to a dentist for further treatment

Did You Know?

Dental sealants are thin, plastic, protective coatings placed on the chewing surface of permanent teeth to prevent cavities.

Dental sealants prevent 80% of cavities in the back teeth, where 9 in 10 cavities occur!

HPSAs, or Health Professional Shortage Areas, are geographic areas and/or specific population groups within our state that are experiencing a shortage of dental care.

Fluoride, nature’s cavity fighter, is a mineral that occurs naturally on earth. All water contains some fluoride, but usually not enough to prevent tooth decay. Community Water Fluoridation (CWF) is the process of adjusting the amount of fluoride in public water supplies to prevent tooth decay. CWF is the most efficient, safe and cost-effective way to prevent tooth decay in communities.

74% of U.S. water systems are fluoridated.

At only 44%, Louisiana ranks 45th in the nation for CWF.

Community Water Fluoridation reduces cavities by 20-40%!

Every $1 spent on fluoridation saves up to $27 in dental treatment costs.

Active Dentists in Louisiana: 2,330
Active Hygienists in Louisiana: 2,228
Parishes with 0 dentists: Assumption, Cameron, Red River, and West Carroll
Additional dentists needed to adequately serve Louisiana: 254

2,852,079 LA residents do not have fluoridated water.

That fills Tiger Stadium 27 times!
The ultimate goal of Well-Ahead is to change the health environment in the places and spaces where we live, work, learn and play so that the healthy choice becomes the easy choice for Louisiana residents. Through Well-Ahead Louisiana, the Louisiana Department of Health fosters a statewide community-based network that promotes health in all places and spaces, connecting organizations and residents across the state to the resources that will make healthy living easily accessible to each and every person. Our work focuses in five areas: Healthy Start, Healthy Weight, Healthy Hearts, Healthy Smiles and Healthy Air. Oral health falls within our Healthy Smiles goal area.

**Well-Ahead Louisiana**

Well-Ahead Louisiana works to promote oral health through education and expanded access to preventative dental services. Best practices to achieve Healthy Smiles include School-Based Dental Sealant Programs and Community Water Fluoridation. Both are evidence-based and proven effective for preventing tooth decay.

**School-Based Dental Sealant Programs:** Between 2004 and 2014, school-based dental sealant programs across the U.S. increased the number of low-income children receiving dental sealants by about 70%. This increase prevented almost one million cavities nationwide! Between 2012 and 2019, Well-Ahead Louisiana’s school-based dental sealant program, Louisiana Seals Smiles, provided oral health screenings to almost 8,700 eligible children throughout Louisiana. Among those screened, the program provided dental sealants to almost 4,750 eligible children. Louisiana Seals Smiles, School-based/School-linked Dental Sealant Program partners with various types of groups to coordinate and implement school sealant programs. These programs include Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), hygiene schools, Area Health Education Centers (AHECs) and public and private grassroots organizations.

**Community Water Fluoridation (CWF):** Well-Ahead Louisiana promotes and educates communities on the effectiveness of CWF. Efforts to increase CWF are executed through the following activities:

- Frequently giving presentations to water system operators/managers, local municipalities, community and civic organizations highlighting the importance of Community Water Fluoridation
- Performing annual inspections to current fluoridating water systems to ensure safe protocols and adherence to regulations
- Reporting optimal water levels monthly to the CDC
- Overseeing the CDC Water Fluoridation Quality Award process
- Coordinating the fluoridation work group through the Oral Health Coalition
- Seeking additional funding through Louisiana’s Safe Drinking Water Program, grants and state leadership

Would you like to be involved in Louisiana’s Healthy Smiles work? Join our Oral Health Coalition by emailing LAOralHealthCoalition@la.gov. Visit the Well-Ahead Louisiana website at [www.wellaheadla.com](http://www.wellaheadla.com) to learn more!

**WellSpot Designation**

Well-Ahead Louisiana has developed a set of evidence-based wellness benchmarks for seven different types of organizations – child care centers, schools, colleges/universities, worksites, restaurants, healthcare facilities and hospitals. The benchmarks, combined with community outreach, encourage policy, systems and environmental change surrounding health behaviors. Once an organization has reached a certain number of benchmarks, the Louisiana Department of Health designates them as an official Level One, Level Two or Level Three WellSpot. Oral health is promoted in the childcare center benchmark set. Childcare centers can either: 1) provide monthly oral health care education to children and parents, or 2) implement a tooth brushing program. A benchmark for health care facilities encourages patient education regarding oral health preventive care and fluoride varnish treatment.