Oral Health: At A Glance

Tooth decay is the most common preventable childhood disease. According to Well-Ahead’s Bright Smiles for Bright Futures Project, among Louisiana’s third graders:

- 55.8% had tooth decay
- 26.5% had untreated cavities
- 23.2% had to be referred to a dentist for further treatment

Less than two out of every five third graders had dental sealants.

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

Did You Know? 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.

Community Water Fluoridation reduces cavities by 20-40%!

Every $1 spent on fluoridation saves up to $38 in dental treatment costs.

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

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

3 parishes have 0 dentists.

- Red River Parish
- Cameron Parish
- Tensas Parish

Number of dentists in Louisiana 2,294

Additional dentists needed to adequately serve Louisiana 276

2,673,187 LA residents do not have fluoridated water.

That fills Tiger Stadium 26 times!
Well-Ahead Louisiana

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.

Healthy Smiles

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 2015, Well-Ahead Louisiana’s school-based dental sealant program, Louisiana Seals Smiles, provided oral health screenings, dental sealants, and fluoride varnish to almost 8,000 eligible children throughout Louisiana. Currently, Well-Ahead Louisiana provides support to various partners providing dental sealant interventions in schools. These partners include: Eat, Move, Grow! (a program that serves children in rural, underserved elementary schools across Louisiana), Louisiana State University’s School of Dentistry, the University of Louisiana Monroe’s Dental Hygiene program and School-Based Health Centers.

Community Water Fluoridation (CWF): Well-Ahead Louisiana promotes and educates communities on the effectiveness of water fluoridation. Efforts to increase community water fluoridation 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.
- Ensuring systems are adhering to the regulations established in the LAC, Title 78, Subpart 5.
- 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.
- Collaborating with Louisiana’s Safe Drinking Water Program to secure possible funding.
- Continually working to obtain support from state leadership for CWF funding.

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 to learn more!

WellSpot Designation

Well-Ahead Louisiana has also developed a set of evidence-based wellness benchmarks for six different types of organizations – child care centers, schools, colleges/universities, worksites, restaurants 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. Soon, Well-Ahead will offer specific designation to non-hospital healthcare providers. A benchmark in this set encourages patient education regarding oral health preventive care and fluoride varnish treatment.

Sources: 1) 2009 Basic Screening Survey (Bright Smiles for Bright Futures) conducted by Well-Ahead Louisiana 2) 2011 BRFSS data 3) HPSA data provided by Bureau of Primary Care and Rural Health, 4) Center for Disease Control and Prevention 5) American Dental Association 6) Well-Ahead Louisiana Fluoridation Tracking 7) State cancer profile 2009-2013