Dental Health Taskforce launches effort to help U.S. children

The U.S. arm of the Global Children’s Dental Health Taskforce is launching an initiative to improve the oral health of toddlers and preschoolers in the U.S. The taskforce, in response to the recent report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) showing that 28 percent of toddlers and preschoolers in the U.S. have tooth decay, and rates of oral disease are even higher among poor and minority children.

The CDC report shows an increase in decay in the primary teeth of children aged 2 to 5 years from 24 percent during the 1980s-1994 timeframe to 28 percent from 1999 through 2004. The study also found that 74 percent of children aged 2 to 11 with tooth decay have unfilled cavities.

“ Tooth decay remains the single most common chronic disease of children in the U.S.—five times more common than asthma,” warns pediatrician David Krol, a member of the taskforce and chairman of pediatrics at the University of Toledo College of Medicine. “It is an insidious disease that starts early and can devastate children’s lives. Children are at greater risk for developing tooth decay when their permanent teeth are in the process of coming in,” added Dr. William Fahey, the American Dental Association’s spokesperson for pediatric dentistry.

The proportion of Mexican American and African American children with unfilled cavities is 1.3 times greater than the proportion of white children with untreated dental disease. Children in poverty are more than twice as likely to have untreated cavities as children from middle and high income families.

“What these statistics mean is that too many children suffer from preventable dental disease,” notes taskforce member Steven Kess, vice president of Henry Schein.

The U.S. taskforce will focus on helping pregnant women and new mothers safeguard their children’s oral health. The taskforce also plans to develop model proposals for local cavity-prevention demonstrations in lower-income communities in Baltimore, Md.; Los Angeles, Calif.; Toledo, Ohio; and at a Native American health services site, according to Dr. Ronald Edelstein, coordinator of the U.S. effort and chair of the Children’s Dental Health Project, a Washington, D.C., policy organization that promotes children’s oral health.

The U.S. taskforce is one of nine, country-wide efforts aimed at eradicating tooth decay in children worldwide by 2028. Participating countries represent more than half of the world’s child population and also include Australia, Brazil, China, India, Mexico, the Philippines, South Africa, and South America.

Henry Schein launches campaign to increase public awareness about the importance of early childhood oral health, using science-based strategies, integrating oral health into other childhood programs and medical care, promoting public policies, and assuring services for all children.

“The decision by the U.S. component of our global taskforce to focus on young children holds tremendous promise for better quality of life among millions of U.S. children,” said taskforce coordinator Raman Bedi, a professor at Kings College in London. “Early childhood tooth decay worldwide too often seizes children up for dental pain and infection that has consequences for their learning readiness, ability to eat, sleep, and experience the normal activities of childhood.”

The global taskforce was established in 2006 after 40 senior dental advisors and chief dental officers called for its formation at the European Union Presidency meeting in England in September 2005. It is supported by the government of the United Kingdom in affiliation with the World Health Organization and Colgate-Palmolive.

How to help

Henry Schein (www.henry schein.com) For information, contact Jason Krause, project manager for Sulli- van-Schein Dental, at 414.290.2555 or Jason.Krause@henryschein.com For Henry Schein Cares, contact Kim Craig, business development manager for Henry Schein, at 651.454.3115 or kim.craig@henryschein.com.

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National Children’s Oral Health Foundation (www.ncohf.org) Contact the NCOHF by mail at 4108 Park Road, Suite 505, Charlotte, NC 28209; by phone at 800.559.9858; or by e-mail at info@ncohf.org.

Oral Health America (www.oralhealthamerica.org) Contact OHA by mail at 410 N. Michi- gan Avenue, Suite 552, Chicago, Ill., 60611; by phone at 312.856.9900; or by e-mail at liz@oralhealthamerica.org.

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