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 is 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 1988-1994 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 Michigan. "It is an insidious disease that starts early and can devastate children's ability to eat, sleep, and experience the normal activities of childhood."

"Early childhood tooth decay世界观 is huge anyway" and "we don't want it to get any worse," Hayes warns that dental decay in little children had not been declining for years, and the spike in early childhood caries could signal a long-term reversal away from better oral health.

"I told my colleagues having too many who are seeing more kids with decay," she says. "This study bears them out." Dr. Craig Ingels, DDS, vice president, dental director, Washington Dental Service, and interim executive director of the Institute for Oral Health, says that to improve the oral health of children, four changes are needed. More dentists need to be trained to treat children, there has to be an end to a one-size-fits-all approach to dentistry, access to care needs to be strengthened, and dental coverage should be reformed and expanded.

"For instance, dentists and schools have done a great job teaching their students to be surgeons—how to treat cavities, infections and other oral ailments in people over age three. But traditional methods to fight tooth decay including fluoridated water, standard fluoride tooth paste, and restorative dentistry can only accomplish so much, and do not solve the problem of transmissible bacteria," he says in a statement issued in response to the CDC report.

"We need to figure out the problem early on by training more dentists to treat children. The risk of cavities in children can be virtually eliminated through preventive techniques such as sealants and fluoride varnish treatments. The standard of care must be: all children receive an oral exam by a dentist or primary care physician by their first birthday.”

"We also need to get away from treating everyone the same. Today’s well-trained dentists already see the need for oral health and good oral hygiene habits, for both children and adults, and tailor prevention programs to their individual needs. Some people need their teeth cleaned every three months, for example, while others can go a year. We need to train dentists to design oral health prevention and treatment plans specific to an individual’s disease risk, and leave behind the one-size fits all approach."

"In addition to training general dentists to treat young children, we need to find ways to overcome the shortage of dentists in rural and lower-income areas. On idea is to cross-train primary care and family practice doctors to conduct basic oral health exams and treatments."

"Finally, we need to fix dental insurance. Everyone, especially children, needs access to oral healthcare, not just people with dental insurance. The current model of providing health insurance for the poor is broken and inadequate for dealing with childhood dental disease. Children are 2.5 times more likely to lack dental insurance than medical insurance. Dental care is an integral part of healthcare and should be viewed that way by government and employers."