

Dental Care for Kids During the Pandemic

Community listening findings
Pediatric Oral Health Coalition

| OCTOBER 2020



Healthy Teeth
Bright Futures

The logo features a red arc above the text "Healthy Teeth" and "Bright Futures" in a blue serif font.

GOALS

Why community listening?

- ▶ Support the Pediatric Oral Health Coalition in community-centered policy development
- ▶ Address access barriers exacerbated and newly created by COVID-19

Community listening principles

- ▶ Center communities' expertise and resilience to own and co-create solutions
- ▶ Acknowledge historical traumas and inequities resurfacing during COVID
- ▶ Create and foster a safe and engaging process
- ▶ Reciprocity and compensation

**INQUIRY
EXERCISE**

Questions

- ▶ Can anyone tell me about a time when you took your child to see a dentist, either for a toothache or a teeth cleaning?
- ▶ Has your child needed to get their teeth checked or treated during the pandemic?
- ▶ Do you have any concerns or worries — whether it's the cost of care, safety, or issues related to COVID-19 — about taking your child to the dentist's office?
- ▶ Are there things you have wanted to do for your child's teeth but haven't done?
- ▶ Where do you get information about keeping your child's teeth healthy and where to find care?
- ▶ Would you say it is generally pretty easy to get care for your child's teeth or not so easy?

What we did

ATTENDANCE

Listening session #1 (English)

- ▶ August 18, 2020
- ▶ 26 parents + caregivers
- ▶ 3 breakout sessions
- ▶ Multnomah, Columbia, Marion, Benton, Washington, Linn, Wallowa

ATTENDANCE

Listening session #2 (Spanish)

- ▶ August 26, 2020
- ▶ 17 parents + caregivers
- ▶ 3 breakout sessions
- ▶ Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas, Linn
- ▶ Registered folks from other counties did not attend

Online questionnaire

- ▶ Offered in English and Spanish
- ▶ Given to listening session participants who couldn't participate in virtual listening sessions
- ▶ Also shared on Facebook
- ▶ 11 total responses
- ▶ Clackamas, Lincoln, Multnomah

**What we heard:
Dental care experiences**

WHAT WE HEARD

Caregivers understand that oral health is important; they want children to have healthy teeth and positive experiences with dental care.

Caregivers:

- ▶ Believe it is their responsibility to ensure good oral health.
- ▶ Are familiar with and practice good oral health habits.
- ▶ Believe that some factors of oral health are genetic and out of their control.
- ▶ Aren't always familiar with local laws and practices related to oral health (standard of care, presence of fluoridated water, etc.).

WHAT WE HEARD

“I feel your orthodontal care is just as important as a well-child exam, so I would absolutely make it a priority to get any one of my kids to a dentist if it was something that would be covered.” –Michelle, St. Helens

“We all eat the same, we all do the same, but he’s been the one who is always suffering.” –Mimi, Portland

WHAT WE HEARD

At the same time, caregivers have general fear and anxiety about dental procedures because of traumatic past experiences.

- ▶ Many reported having negative experiences with dental care.
- ▶ They want to prevent trauma for their children.
- ▶ Experiences that cause the most anxiety included: anesthesia, removal of teeth, not understanding procedures in advance.

WHAT WE HEARD

“I heard so many horror stories about dentists. Myself, I had bad experiences with them.” –Jose, Portland

“I feel like I delayed taking my daughter to the dentist at first because the one dentist who would take our insurance was really scary and I was more worried about her having a bad dental experience.” –Jessie, Joseph

“When she came out of anesthesia, I was petrified. It was terrifying, the most excruciating feeling in my heart as a mom to watch my baby go out like this. I knew she needed it done but watching her go through that was absolutely excruciating.”

–Michelle, St. Helens

WHAT WE HEARD

When it comes to getting information about oral health, families trust schools, doctors, social services and other parents.

Spanish Session:

- ▶ **Schools**
- ▶ Clinics
- ▶ **Pediatrician**
- ▶ Dental offices
- ▶ Community programs shared by friends/family members
- ▶ **WIC**

English Session

- ▶ **Schools**
- ▶ CCOs
- ▶ **Pediatrician**
- ▶ Dental hygienist
- ▶ Email and mail from dentist
- ▶ Oregon WIC texting
- ▶ Head Start family advocate
- ▶ Tribal office
- ▶ **Facebook parent groups**
- ▶ Community events

WHAT WE HEARD

“I am just doing my own research online. I joined this Beaverton mom’s group where you get to ask questions [and hear about] experiences from other moms. Based off that is what I’m trying to be taking care of her teeth at home.” –Amy, Beaverton

“Pre-COVID we would get information at community events. Whenever there was a kid event happening, there would be a dental provider there with information about oral hygiene and things you could be doing.” –Jessie, Joseph

“My dentist sends regular emails, reminders about cleanings and remember to brush your teeth and stuff like that.” –Jose, Portland

WHAT WE HEARD

Above all, families want caring, child-focused relationships with their dental providers.

This includes:

- ▶ Playful, fun interactions with staff
- ▶ Kid-friendly ambience, prizes
- ▶ Family-friendly explanations of tools and procedures
- ▶ Speaking directly to children
- ▶ No shaming/blaming parents
- ▶ Flexible appointment times

WHAT WE HEARD

“When I lost insurance, and got new insurance, I had to look through the network and call around to see who would accept that insurance. So that was a little more difficult. Because I had been with someone a very long time and I trusted them.”

–Shaniqwa, Gresham

“Not all dental clinics are equal... now we’re at a clinic where they make an effort to make the child feel a bit more comfortable, they try to get the child’s point of view, which is very important... compared to the first few years when we were in an OHP clinic where they just diagnose and they go about their ways...you feel like the energy in the room is not really inviting for questions.” –Celia, Portland

WHAT WE HEARD

Families on OHP say it is difficult to find a provider they like and that they regularly experience scheduling delays when making appointments.

- ▶ Same-day appointments are needed, but difficult to get.
- ▶ Families want appointment times that fit their work schedule and are not during school hours.
- ▶ They experience long wait times for initial appointments, then again when making follow-up appointments.
- ▶ Long wait times for follow-up appointments to deal with specific problems were particularly frustrating for families.

WHAT WE HEARD

“For me, the most difficult thing has been scheduling an appointment.”

—Ana Luz, Albany

“It was a process of finding who our dentist was, then there was a long waiting period because of the limited amount of Medicaid patients they would take so we ended up waiting a couple of months.” —Sarah, St. Helens

“Getting dental appointments is always difficult. One of my kids had a cavity, but the next appointment they could get was almost 4 months out. Then what? My kid’s going to be back in pain, crying and going through this again? I just really wish they would make it a reasonable amount of time before the tooth is more damaged.”

—Celia, Portland

WHAT WE HEARD

Families outside of Portland report long drive times to get to preferred dental providers that are covered by their insurance.

- ▶ Families with OHP are particularly limited when it comes to finding convenient providers.
- ▶ Driving time creates an extra burden for families.
- ▶ It is especially difficult for families in need of medical transportation.

WHAT WE HEARD

“We’re in a very inconvenient place—driving an hour to Portland or the other direction 45-50 minutes. Nothing is close and everything is somewhat of a burden to get to.”

–Sarah, St. Helens

“We have three dentists in Rainier but we aren’t allowed to go to them.”

–Cheryl, Rainier

“Right now we live in South Salem and there are quite a few places that do not take OHP. We have Native American insurance as well, but it’s supposed to be used as secondary. And a lot of places don’t take those.” –Martha, South Salem

WHAT WE HEARD

Cost of care is a concern for many families, particularly for those without consistent insurance coverage.

- ▶ These families said they rely more on school resources and are more likely to pay out of pocket for emergency care.
- ▶ In many cases, care was delayed or limited due to cost.
- ▶ Immigrants are unaccustomed to the limited and very costly dental care in the U.S.
- ▶ Unpredictable employment during COVID-19 exacerbated cost concerns.

WHAT WE HEARD

“I’m interested in how we can make dental access more affordable. It’s treated like a luxury and it should be more like healthcare.” –Jenny, Portland

“I would make sure they were able to see the school nurse and the school dentist...so at least if some problems do pop up you can take them. If they ever do need to go, I would pay cash out of my pocket. It’s very expensive.”

–Anjenette, East Portland

“There are lots of kids that [school] really is the only way they get some of those screenings. If that’s not happening at school, where is it happening? Or will it happen at all? That is kind of frightening for people.” –Jessie, Joseph

WHAT WE HEARD

Providers do not readily offer interpretive services, which heightens misunderstandings, creates distrust and affects quality of care.

- ▶ Few Spanish-speaking participants said they were aware of such services.
- ▶ Families have the most trouble communicating health issues, asking questions and understanding answers, securing follow-up appointments and understanding overall health trajectories.
- ▶ They often feel taken advantage of and misunderstood, but unsure how to advocate for themselves.

WHAT WE HEARD

**“The first clinic we went to had a person who spoke Spanish but then they referred us to a different clinic to treat the infection and they didn’t speak Spanish there.”
–Alda, Portland**

WHAT WE HEARD

Families understand the connection between braces and oral health and mentioned frequently the need for OHP to cover braces.

- ▶ Many families wanted braces for their children.
- ▶ Most mentioned they couldn't afford them or struggled to pay for them.
- ▶ They saw them as important for overall physical and mental health, not just cosmetic.

WHAT WE HEARD

“I know that OHP would pay for it if there’s issues—if it’s causing pain or headaches—but it’s just pushing her teeth forward.” –Michelle, St. Helens

“I ended up getting braces on my own because OHP didn’t cover that. So I had to go through steps of my own.” –Laura, Salem

“OHP can only do so much. Does not cover braces. I would take them to get it if it was fully covered.” –Orlisa, Portland

“My oldest son got braces. Pretty expensive. Dental does not cover it and you have to pay upfront. I learned how to save money. That was his wish before high school. Now he has beautiful teeth.” –Anjenette, East Portland

**What we heard:
Dental care during COVID-
19**

WHAT WE HEARD

Most families believe that, during COVID-19, dental providers are open for emergency visits only.

- ▶ A majority have not visited the dentist and don't plan to unless there's an emergency.
- ▶ Some have heard directly from dental clinics that they are closed.
- ▶ Some are presuming that dentists' offices are closed.
- ▶ Others don't yet have a regular dentist and plan to wait until after COVID-19 to establish care.
- ▶ There is some confusion about what qualifies as an emergency.

WHAT WE HEARD

“He had an appointment for March and then COVID hit and we haven’t been able to reschedule it since. Every time they say their clinic is being shut down and is not taking patients.” –Cheryl, Rainier

“I’m not sure if they’re making appointments. I honestly haven’t called. But I understand that if it is urgent, they will see us but if not, then no. But I think that even though I want to do it, I’ll have to do it since I need to take [my child].”
–Guadalupe, Clackamas

**“Three of my kids have cavities and we can’t get in anywhere because of the COVID-19. They said it has to be an emergency. I don’t know what to think. Maybe I should call around a look to see a different dentist? I don’t know.” –
Martha, South Salem**

WHAT WE HEARD

At best, caregivers feel anxious about going to the dentist during the pandemic.

- ▶ Many are choosing to stay home to protect themselves and their families from COVID-19.
- ▶ Black parents were more likely to say that going to the dentist during COVID-19 poses a serious risk to their health.

WHAT WE HEARD

“Of course I’m scared for my kids. We don’t know this disease. Unless it’s super painful and needs to be dealt with, everything else can wait.” –Celia, Portland

“I feel, as a Black person, I don’t want to go to the dentist or the emergency room and not have COVID and then come out and have COVID... where if I never went to the doctor or dentist then I would have been fine.” –Shaniqwa, Gresham

“I’m the only person that [my daughter] depends on financially, so I will not risk anything where I will have to opt out of work just because right now any job you have is important and you hold on to that. So, I’d rather do the safety route and stay home.”
–Amy, Beaverton

WHAT WE HEARD

Those who *have* gone to a dentist during COVID-19 say it's stressful.

Overall experiences:

- ▶ Precautions being taken, with a few exceptions
- ▶ Long wait times for appointments
- ▶ Having to wait in the car + not getting accurate follow-up information
- ▶ Crowded waiting rooms, at times

Precautions reported:

- ▶ Symptom check by phone
- ▶ Symptom/temperature check at entry
- ▶ One parent allowed in
- ▶ Hand sanitizing
- ▶ Masks required
- ▶ Quicker service/less waiting
- ▶ Plexiglass barriers

WHAT WE HEARD

“They were really safe and sanitary about everything. We were in and out of there actually pretty quick. It was really efficient and I felt really safe.” –Laura, Salem

“I was incredibly overwhelmed with the amount of people coming in and out of the small waiting room. It really was overwhelming.” –Sarah, Philomath

“My daughter was due for a cleaning after they had opened it up in May to Phase I. I did send her in by herself because they didn’t want extra people, which is sort of nerve-racking when your 9-year-old is retelling you what the dentist and hygienist said, it’s not always very reliable. I don’t think there were any problems... I actually still don’t really know.” –Jessie, Joseph

WHAT WE HEARD

Those who *haven't* yet gone to the dentist say they want to know more about precautions being taken before they visit.

- ▶ What is being done to keep people safe?
- ▶ What are the risks?
- ▶ What's an emergency?
- ▶ Dental office staff don't appear to be proactively reaching out to let patients know about precautions.

WHAT WE HEARD

“[It would be good to hear from dentists about what they are doing so] we can have some requirements and some base standards. In the midst of a pandemic you really have to ask particular questions and ask about training and who will be there and how many people they are allowing in... so many factors. If you care enough to take care of their teeth, you obviously don’t want to come home with COVID.”
–Anjenette, East Portland

“None of us has ever been through a pandemic. With so much information thrown at everybody with everything, it’s kind of hard to know what is truth and what is false and what precautions anybody is taking.” –Cheryl, Rainier

What it means

WHAT IT MEANS

During the pandemic—and after—families want proactive ways to learn about preventive care and common dental issues.

- ▶ School has been an important source for preventive care—even while dentists and pediatricians are the primary source for seeking care when problems arise.
- ▶ Parents need proactive communication from CCOs, doctors and dentists to support them with preventing and addressing common issues.
- ▶ Peer groups and community-based social media provide new opportunities for reaching caregivers.

WHAT IT MEANS

Families want a consistent standard of family-friendly dental care that includes cultural competence and more culturally specific providers.

- ▶ Families want strengths-based, non-judgmental communications with their providers.
- ▶ Families value relationship-building that is grounded in cultural understanding, which could lead to more consistent care and improved outcomes.

WHAT IT MEANS

Families want to understand their rights for accessing interpretive services and want providers to use them more freely and consistently.

- ▶ This is an equity issue that could be exacerbating health disparities.
- ▶ Families need access to interpretation so that they can better understand procedures, support their child's oral health and follow through with services.
- ▶ Families need more education and tools so they know how to request and access interpretive services.
- ▶ We need to understand the barriers to connecting families with interpretive services among dental providers to inform potential solutions in culture and practice.

WHAT IT MEANS

Families want more family-friendly dental provider options in their area.

Especially in rural areas, families need access to more providers that:

- ▶ Are covered by OHP
- ▶ Have flexible appointment times (evenings and weekends)
- ▶ Offer reasonable appointment wait times for appointments that address issues
- ▶ Are located within 15-20 minutes' drive of where they live

WHAT IT MEANS

Families want braces to be covered by OHP.

- ▶ They understand the connection between orthodontic intervention and other aspects of physical and mental health, particularly for adolescents.
- ▶ Their children need braces, but they feel they have few options when it comes to paying for them.
- ▶ They worry about the effects on their child's mental health and quality of life, the longer braces are delayed.

WHAT IT MEANS

Families want dental providers to proactively communicate about COVID-19 precautions.

Families need to know:

- ▶ If dentist offices are open and what kind of services they are offering.
- ▶ What is expected and what precautions are being taken, before, during and after the visit.
- ▶ How to prepare themselves and their child before the visit.
- ▶ How to speak up and advocate for themselves.

WHAT IT MEANS

Families who are reluctant to visit the dentist still need to know what they can do for their child's oral health during the pandemic.

- ▶ Many need support weighing the risks of being exposed to COVID-19 against the risks of delayed dental care.
- ▶ They want to understand what qualifies as a dental emergency to help make the best decision for their child and family.
- ▶ They need to know what they can do for their child's teeth if they can't or won't visit the dentist during the pandemic.

Thank you!

