

COVID-19 restrictions lead to poorer oral health and long-term problems

A [new study](#) published today by the University of Melbourne and the eviDent Foundation highlights the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the provision of dental care to vulnerable children in Australia who already experience higher levels of dental disease and disadvantage in accessing dental care.

Lead author and CEO of the Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch (ADAVB) A/Prof Matt Hopcraft said the research found that from March to September there were 881,454 fewer dental services provided in 2020 than 2019.

“Restrictions imposed on dentists to provide only emergency dental care effectively shut down dental practices in late March through April, and again when Victoria experienced a second wave from July to September,” said A/Prof Hopcraft.

“April saw an 86.9 per cent decrease in treatment provided through the Child Dental Benefits Schedule (CDBS) to vulnerable children across Australia, and this was replicated in Victoria later in the year”.

Restrictions on the provision of dental care were deemed necessary to minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19, but the impact of these restrictions on oral health will be long lasting. Given the chronic and progressive nature of dental disease, the deferral of necessary preventive dental care is likely to contribute to poorer oral health and long-term problems for many Australians.

Tooth decay is one of the most prevalent health conditions affecting Australian children, affecting one in three children by the aged of five to six years, and 40 per cent of children by 12-14 years have tooth decay in their adult teeth. Dental disease is the leading cause of preventable hospitalisation amongst Australian children.

The CDBS provides up to \$1000 of dental care to children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, with a strong emphasis on preventive care. With access to care reduced during the pandemic, routine dental problems were more likely to escalate to dental emergencies, and this was reflected in the fact that although there was a large decrease in preventive care provided, the number of extractions and root canal treatments did not decline by the same amount.

“Delayed or deferred access to dental care meant that many routine dental problems deteriorated, and dentists now are reporting more emergencies and poorer health outcomes for their patients,” said A/Prof Hopcraft. “There is also real concern about the impact of delayed diagnosis of oral cancers.”

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Given the chronic and progressive nature of dental disease, the deferral of necessary dental care is likely to contribute to poorer oral health and long-term problems for many Australians, and place greater pressure on public dental waiting lists, particularly in Victoria.

Read the study:

[Impact of COVID-19 on the provision of paediatric dental care: Analysis of the Australian Child Dental Benefits Schedule](#)

Media enquiries:

Interviews are available with A/Prof Matt Hopcraft on 8825 4600.

About the eviDent Foundation:

The eviDent Foundation is a health-promotion charity supporting Australia's only Dental Practice Based Research Network. eviDent enhances the clinical outcomes of dental practice and improves patient care by facilitating research within and relevant to dental practices. Visit evident.org.au for more information.



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