

# Abstract

**INTRODUCTION** Oral health represents the largest unmet health care need for children, and geographic variation in children's receipt of oral health services have been noted. However, children's oral health outcomes have not been systematically evaluated over time and across states. This study examined changes in parent-reported children's oral health status and receipt of preventive dental visits in 50 states and the District of Columbia.

**METHODS** We used data from the 2003 and the 2011/2012 National Survey of Children's Health. National and state-level estimates of the adjusted prevalence of oral health status and preventive dental visits were calculated and changes over time examined. Multi-variable logistic regression was used to compare outcomes across all states and the District of Columbia for each survey year.

**RESULTS** The percentage of parents who reported that their children had excellent or very good oral health increased from 67.7% in 2003 to 71.9% in 2011/2012. Parents who reported that their children had preventive dental visits increased from 71.5% in 2003 to 77.0% in 2011/2012. The prevalence of children with excellent or very good oral health status increased in 26 states, and the prevalence of children who received at least 1 preventive care dental visit increased in 45 states. In both years, there was more variation among states for preventive dental visits than for oral health status.

**CONCLUSIONS** State variation in oral health status and receipt of preventive dental services remained after adjusting for demographic characteristics. Understanding these differences is critical to addressing the most common chronic disease of childhood and achieving the oral health objectives of Healthy People 2020.

## Key Words

children, oral health, pediatric dentistry, public health, preventive dental visits, dental care utilization