More Black Kids Seeing Dentists, But They Get Worse Care Than Whites

July 10, 2012

Although African-American and white children currently seetheir dentists at almost equal rates, more needs to be done to make sure blackkids get better quality care, according to a study published in the journalPediatrics and reported by HealthDay News.

For the study, researchers used data from five U.S. NationalHealth Interview Surveys, administered between 1964 and 2010, to track trendsin children's dental care. Scientists focused on children ages 2 to 17 andreviewed whether or not they'd visited a dentist in the past year.

Findings showed the percentage of black and white childrenwho had not seen a dentist in the past year dropped from about 52 percent in1964 to 22 percent in 2010. What's more, the percentage of kids who had neverseen a dentist dropped from nearly 34 percent in 1964 to 11 percent in 2010.

"We imagine that some of the government programs targeted tothese children may have contributed to narrowing the gap," said Inyang Isong,an instructor in pediatrics at Massachusetts General Hospital, in Boston, and thestudy's lead author. (Such programs include Medicaid and the Children's HealthInsurance Program.

Despite the good news, findings also showed thatAfrican-American children weren't receiving the same type of dental careservices as their white peers, even though they had similar access to oralhealth services. In addition, black kids had more cavities than white children.

Why? Well, some doctors believe this disparity may be causedby diet, the availability of sugary drinks, and the poor quality of dental carethat low-income African-American children might receive.

The good news is doctors also think almost all childhoodoral health problems are preventable. That means these study findings should promptdoctors to redouble their efforts to provide preventive dental care tochildren.

Did you know that racial gaps exist in other areas of healthtoo? Click here to find out more.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.