

# Evaluating the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Michigan Head Start Community

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## INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, Michigan issued an executive order directing medical and dental offices to temporarily postpone all non-essential procedures due to COVID-19.

Challenges upon reopening included:

- Lack of personal protective equipment
- Staff shortages in dental offices and Head Start (HS) agencies
- New infection control guidance
- Patient fears
- School toothbrushing programs were shut down, such as Head Start centers and onsite preventive dental care programs

## OBJECTIVE

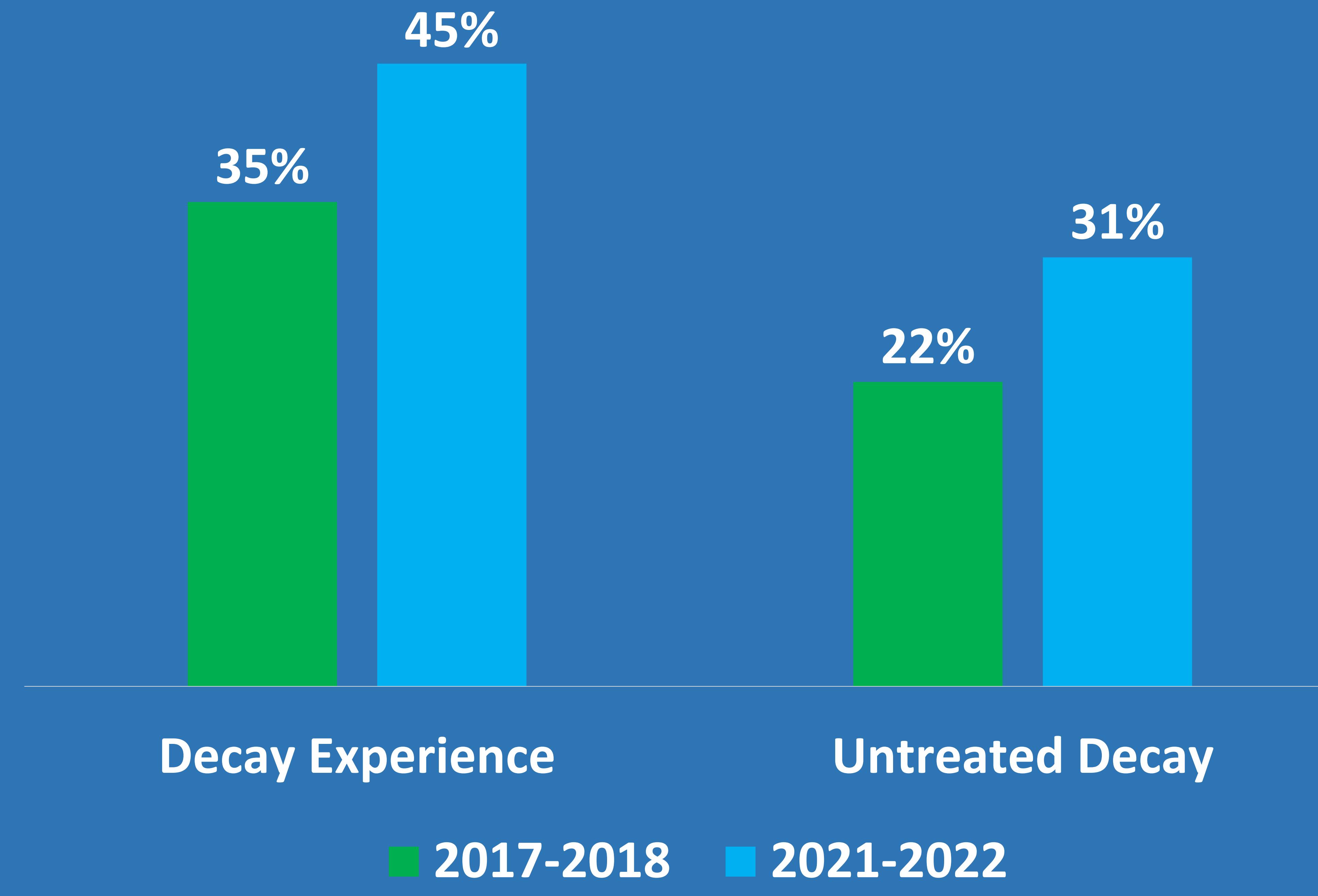
We used Head Start open mouth screenings to examine how the oral health of children was impacted by the shutdowns in 2020.

## METHODS

- Head Start Basic Screening Surveys (BSS) were conducted in the 2017-2018 and 2021-2022 school years. Schools were randomly selected to receive a dental screening of children 3-5 years old.
- Screenings looked for decay experience, sealants, white spot lesions and silver diamine fluoride.
- Decay experience is defined as a child with tooth decay (indicated by fillings, crowns, and extracted teeth) either in the past or at the time of survey.
- Untreated decay is defined as a child with tooth decay or a cavity that has not received appropriate treatment.
- Significance was determined using the corresponding 95% confidence intervals; two rates are considered significantly different if their confidence intervals do not overlap.



# Oral Health among Michigan Head Start children is significantly worse after 2020.



## DISCUSSION

- There was a significant increase in decay experience and untreated decay in Michigan's Head Start Children before and after 2020.
- The increase in decay experience suggests that there was a possible increase in certain behaviors associated with tooth decay such as increased sugar consumption, decreased toothbrushing, and decreased access to dental care.
- The increase in untreated decay is likely due to decreased access to preventive dental care.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Oral Health Program should focus efforts on children in Michigan, particularly in Head Start programs, to promote regular dental visits and reinstate/continue classroom toothbrushing and other preventive dental programs that were impacted by COVID-19. In addition, program planning should focus on parents/caregivers and provide education on the importance of oral health.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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