

# Influence of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Pediatric Oral Health Habits & Diet & COVID-19 Concerns

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## RESULTS & CONCLUSIONS:

### INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVE:

- In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic, leading to global extreme measures to limit the spread of infectious disease.<sup>1</sup> On March 16, 2020, the American Dental Association (ADA) recommended that dental offices postpone non-emergency dental procedures.<sup>2</sup> While non-emergency dental procedures have resumed, COVID-19 pandemic continued to influence pediatric dental care.
- The purpose of this study was to evaluate caregivers' attitudes toward dental visits and the perceived danger of contracting COVID-19 and to assess oral health habits (tooth brushing and flossing) and diet observed by parents during the lockdown.

### METHODS:

- Caregivers of pediatric patients (N=295) were surveyed on the child's diet, the child's oral health habits, and their attitudes toward attendance at dental appointments during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Descriptive statistics were calculated to describe demographics (relationship to the patient, age, marital status, education level, and income) and questions related to dietary changes, attitudes towards dental visits, concerns related to contracting COVID-19, and oral hygiene practices during the pandemic.

### REFERENCES:

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3. American Dental Association Councils on Scientific Affairs and Dental Practice. Caries Risk Assessment Form Completion Instructions. 2009. Revised 2011. Accessed November 1, 2022. <https://www.ada.org/-/media/project/ada-organization/ada/ada-org/files/resources>
4. Ramos-Gomez FJ, Crall J, Gansky SA, Slayton RL, Featherstone JD. Caries risk assessment appropriate for the age 1 visit (infants and toddlers). *J Calif Dent Assoc.* 2007;35(10):687-702.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics including oral hygiene habits, diet, and COVID-19 Concerns.

	N= 295	Percentage
<b>DIET &amp; ORAL HEALTH HABITS</b>		
<b>Patient Comfort Food Consumption Before Pandemic</b>		
Multiple Times a Week	124	42.0%
Once a Week	93	31.5%
Once or Twice a Month	35	11.9%
Multiple Times a Day	25	8.5%
Never	18	6.1%
<b>Patient Comfort Food Consumption During Pandemic</b>		
<b>Increase</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>48.5%</b>
No Change	123	41.7%
Decrease	22	7.5%
Other	7	2.4%
<b>Patient Brushing Habits Before Pandemic</b>		
Multiple Times a Day	139	47.1%
Once a Day	111	37.6%
Never	0	0%
<b>Patient Brushing Habits During Pandemic</b>		
No Change	200	67.8%
<b>Decrease</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>21.0%</b>
Increase	27	9.2%
<b>Change in Caregiver Level of Attention to Oral Health During Pandemic</b>		
<b>No change</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>62.0%</b>
Increase	77	26.1%
Decrease	35	11.9%
<b>COVID-19 CONCERNS</b>		
<b>Level of Danger for Contracting COVID-19 at Dental Clinics</b>		
More Dangerous	94	31.9%
<b>Similar</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>48.8%</b>
Less Dangerous	57	19.3%
<b>Level of Worry About Child Contracting COVID-19 from Dental Clinic</b>		
Very Worried	100	33.9%
Somewhat Worried	95	32.2%
Not Worried	100	33.9%
<b>Willingness to Take Child to Dentist During Height of Pandemic</b>		
Yes	136	46.1%
No	74	25.1%
Only for Emergency	85	28.8%
<b>Child Dentist Appointment During Pandemic</b>		
Yes, we attended the appointment	76	25.8%
Yes, but the appointment was cancelled by the clinic	55	18.6%
Yes, but we cancelled the appointment	26	8.8%
<b>No</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>46.8%</b>
<b>Child Experience of Dental Visit During Pandemic</b>		
<b>Comfortable, would take the child again</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>93.4%</b>
Uncomfortable, would rather not take the child again	5	6.6%

- **25.8%** of guardians reported **patients attending appointments** during the lockdown period. Of this cohort, **93.4%** of these caregivers reported that they **felt comfortable returning** to future appointments. By maintaining access to care and following ADA guidelines for infection control, caregivers felt comfortable to bringing their children back for future dental care during the pandemic.
- **Nearly 10%** of our population's caregivers report a decreased level of attention to their children's oral hygiene habits.
- **48.5%** of caregivers reported an **increase in comfort food** during the pandemic and **21%** reported a **decrease in brushing habits**. These two factors, diet and oral hygiene, have been noted on the ADA caries risk assessment form and likely resulted in increased caries risk for patients during the pandemic.<sup>3</sup>
- The clinical significance of increased cariogenic food and decreased oral hygiene practices should not be ignored. It has been well documented that a patient's caries risk increases with high carbohydrate diets and decreased oral hygiene regimen<sup>3,4</sup>.

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