

## BACKGROUND

Dental emergencies are painful and stressful experiences, comprising 6% percent of all pediatric dental encounters<sup>1</sup>. The most common dental procedures completed at dental emergencies are radiographs (61%) and extractions (12%)<sup>1</sup>. When dental emergencies present to the emergency department (ED), it is often for non-traumatic conditions, with caries being the most common condition<sup>2</sup>. These visits can be costly to families and insurance<sup>2</sup> and often do not receive definitive care due to lack of dental providers in an ED<sup>3</sup>. For patients presenting with traumatic dental injuries, EDs may not be equipped to manage the emergency, resulting in delayed care or referral. This highlights the importance of establishing a dental home that serves to provide routine and emergency dental care. The aim of this investigation was to review reasons for referral to Children's National Hospital (CNH) Division of Dentistry for emergency dental treatment during normal business hours, in hopes of better understanding our emergency patient demographics and their access to care.

## PURPOSE

To review the demographics of walk-in dental emergency patients at CNH and identify barriers in accessing emergency dental treatment during normal business hours

## METHODS

Accompanying adults of pediatric emergency patients completed an emergency intake form detailing: date of birth, accompanying adult, legal guardian status, pain status, whether they were referred, the nature of their dental emergency, whether the patient's dentist was contacted, if they visited the emergency department (ED), and why they chose to come to CNH dental. Dental providers recorded the diagnosis after the examination. Data was collected for 5 months. Descriptive statistics were completed.

## RESULTS (n=206)

Figure 1: Dental diagnosis during emergency presentation

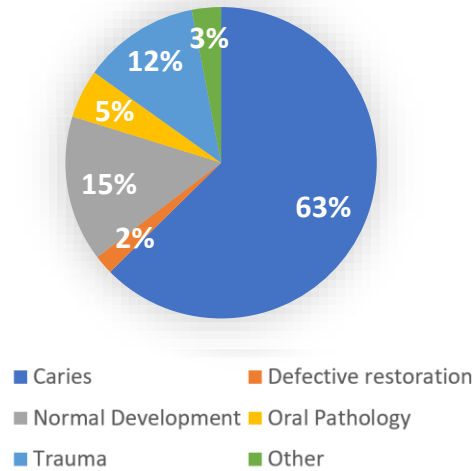


Figure 3: Reason for presenting to CNH dental

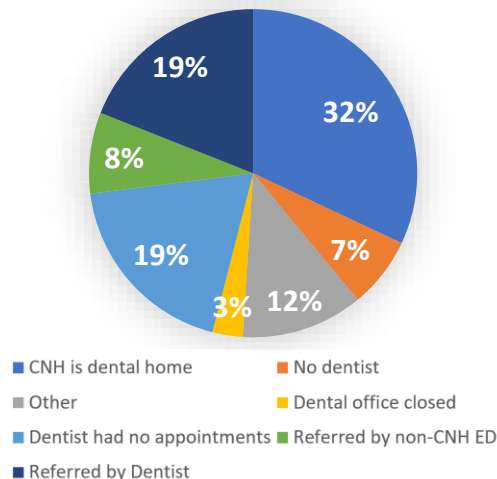


Figure 2: Age of patient at time of emergency

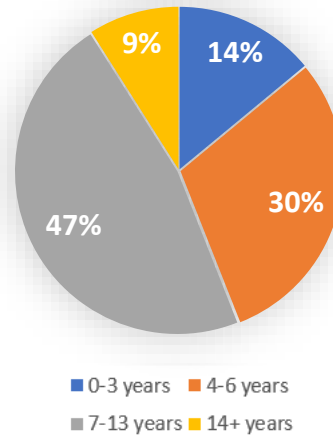
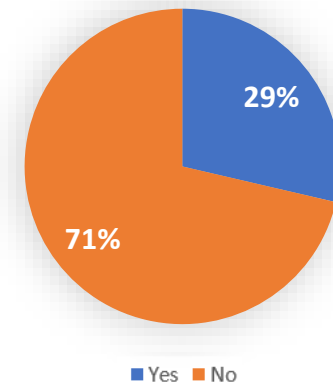


Figure 4: Percent of patients that presented to an ED first



## DISCUSSION

This study evaluated patients that presented to CNH dental clinic during normal business hours for a dental emergency. Similar to other literature, our study found caries to be the most common cause for emergency presentation<sup>2,3</sup>. New patients presenting as emergencies commonly reported that they sought care at CNH because their dentist had no appointments, the office was closed, or because their dentist referred them for management. This indicates that private offices may struggle to manage unscheduled emergencies in the community setting.

This study highlights common barriers encountered when seeking emergency pediatric dental care. Over 40% of all patients who presented as emergencies were patients with previously established dental homes, indicating that access to community dentists may be insufficient for the management of dental emergencies. This may be due to inflexible scheduling practices or lack of comfort in managing such emergencies. Our study also noted that nearly one third of patients presented to the emergency department prior to presenting to our dental clinic. This introduces an enormous opportunity to mitigate healthcare burden through bypassing the emergency department, especially since the majority of emergencies are non-traumatic in nature. Through anticipatory guidance of our patient population and community outreach to local dentists, we may reduce ED utilization, thereby expediting care, lowering healthcare costs for families and insurers, and improving overall patient satisfaction.

Limitations of this study included only reviewing intake forms from a short, five-month period completed by English proficient individuals and their understanding of how to fill out the emergency form. Future research should investigate ED utilization for dental emergencies, referral sources for hospital-based clinics, and barriers to accessing emergency dental care from dental homes in the community. Lastly, community dentists could be surveyed regarding their comfort in treating emergencies so that continuing education courses could be created to increase proficiency.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the barriers to accessing emergency dental treatment in the community. Informing the dental community of this need may encourage private practices to accept emergency patients and keep dental patients out of the emergency department.

## REFERENCES:

