

# Critically Appraised Topic: Among children with special care needs, what are the barriers for access to oral health care?

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## Clinical Problem

Children with special needs are shown to have a poorer oral health status than those without[1] This is largely due to a decreased access to dental health care as a result of many barriers that this population faces. The barriers are at the level of both access to care and to issues that arise during dental treatment.

## Clinical question

Among patients with special needs between the ages of 1-20, what are the barriers for access to oral health care and how do they affect dental care services utilization rate?

## Clinical Bottom Line

Limited evidence suggests that the main barriers to dental care for children with special care needs are: the reluctance/unwillingness of the dentist to take the time to treat a disabled child, financial constraints, transportation issues, long waiting times, architectural limitations of the clinic, and the uncooperativeness of the child.

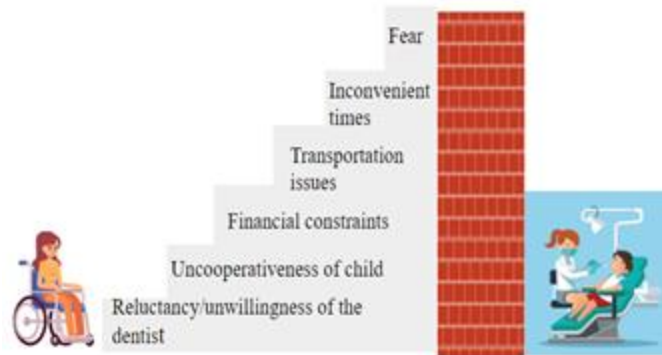
## Evidence Search

Search date: 18-01-2023; PubMed yield: 153 evidence sources. Additional Search: Medline (Pubmed), Ebsco, Cochrane, Embase and Google Scholar

## Results

The major barriers identified by caregivers were:

- Reluctancy/unwillingness of the dentist (5% to 75%)
- Uncooperativeness of the child (33% to 63.4%)
- Financial constraints (21% to 68%)
- Transportation issues (19% to 31.6%)
- Inconvenient clinic hours (12% to 13%)
- Fear of dentist (26.9% to 39%)
- Waiting times (36.7%)
- Medical condition complicate dental treatment (34%)
- Difficulty of the child to sit in the dental chair (28.2%)
- Difficulty to locate dentist (15%)
- Architectural limitations of the clinic (3% )



## Acknowledgements

This CAT was made possible through the support of Sangeeth Pillai, Dr. Irwin Fried and Dr. Svetlana Tikhonova.

**Strengths:** SR; 5 databases; MeSH terms and keywords; clear inclusion and exclusion criteria; PRISMA diagram; summary table; quality assessment using Newcastle Ottawa scale.

**Limitations:** Focuses solely on caregivers' perspective; no information on the expertise of the dentists, educational background or severity of disabilities; only studies in English included; 10-year search limit; no grey literature; mixed methods; no arbitrator; exclusion of qualitative studies.

## Clinical Applicability

- Studies from the USA, Saudi Arabia, UK, Poland, and India.
- The barriers can be applied to Canadian population; still, limitations exist due to financial, and socioeconomic disparities among study settings/countries.
- Descriptive cross-sectional studies limit the long term follow up and in depth understanding of the barriers
- Severity of the disabilities and comorbidities not mentioned
- Only barriers experienced by caregivers identified, lack of the children and dentists' perspective.
- Future research should also focus on dentists' perspectives and a qualitative assessment of barriers

## Reference

Krishnan, L., Iyer, K., & Madan Kumar, P. D. (2020). Barriers to utilisation of dental care services among children with special needs: A systematic review. *Indian journal of dental research : official publication of Indian Society for Dental Research*, 31(3), 486–493

Lebrun-Harris, Lydie et al, Oral Health Among Children and Youth With Special Health Care Needs, *Pediatric*, 2021.

Link for CAT's summary: [https://doi.org/10.4103/ijdr.IJDR\\_542\\_18](https://doi.org/10.4103/ijdr.IJDR_542_18)