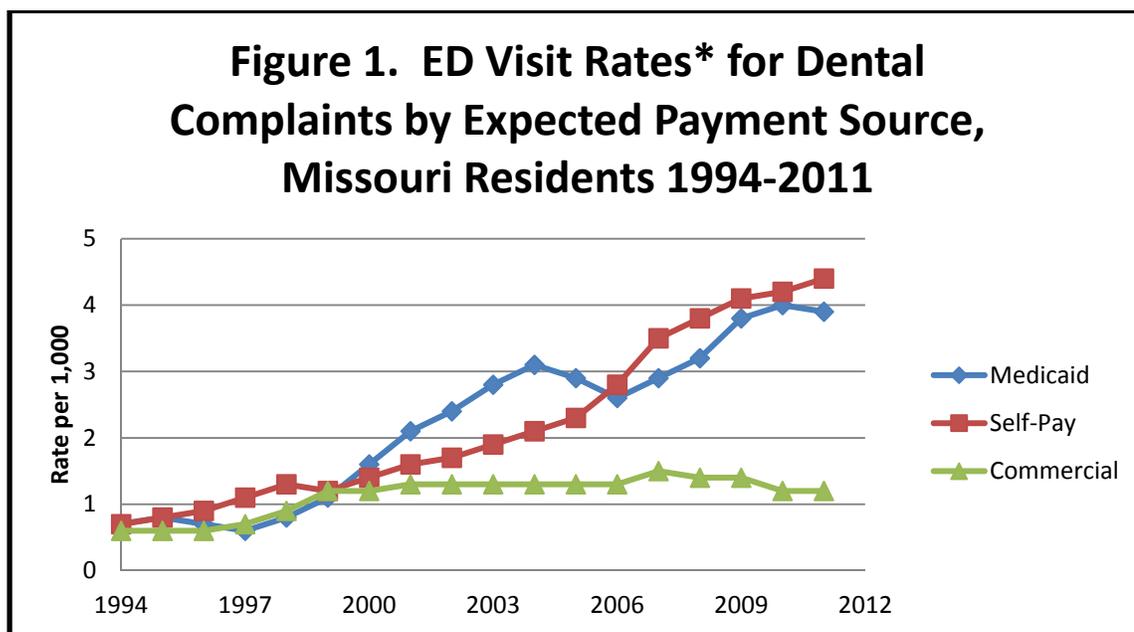




## Oral Health Fact Sheet: Emergency Department Utilization for Dental Complaints, Missouri 1994-2011

A number of national studies have described an increase in dental-related emergency department (ED) visits in recent years.<sup>1</sup> This trend has also been observed in Missouri; between 1994 and 2011, there was a 368% increase in age-adjusted ED visit rates for dental complaints.<sup>2</sup> This is significant because the primary diagnosis for these visits includes “disorders of the tooth and jaw” which are complaints that could be treated in a dental office rather than an ED and specifically exclude injuries. In 2011 alone, 58,714 ED visits for dental complaints occurred among Missouri residents.<sup>2</sup> According to national estimates, an ED visit for a dental complaint costs more than \$300<sup>1</sup>; based on this estimate, Missouri dental ED visits exceeded \$17.6 million in 2011. Furthermore, hospitals generally only provide short-term relief of symptoms, and many will require an additional visit to a dentist to complete their treatment.<sup>1</sup>

Figure 1 shows that starting in the year 2000 Medicaid (MO Health Net) was the leading expected payment source for ED visits until 2006 when “self-pay” became the leading payment source. It is unclear whether ED visits in the “self-pay” category are paid by the patient out-of-pocket or how hospitals are compensated for these visits. In 2011 alone, it is estimated that ED visits resulted in \$6.6 million in charges to Medicaid and \$7.4 million in charges in the “self-pay” category. Estimates indicate that Medicaid was the expected pay source for nearly \$70 million in charges between 1994 and 2011.<sup>2</sup>

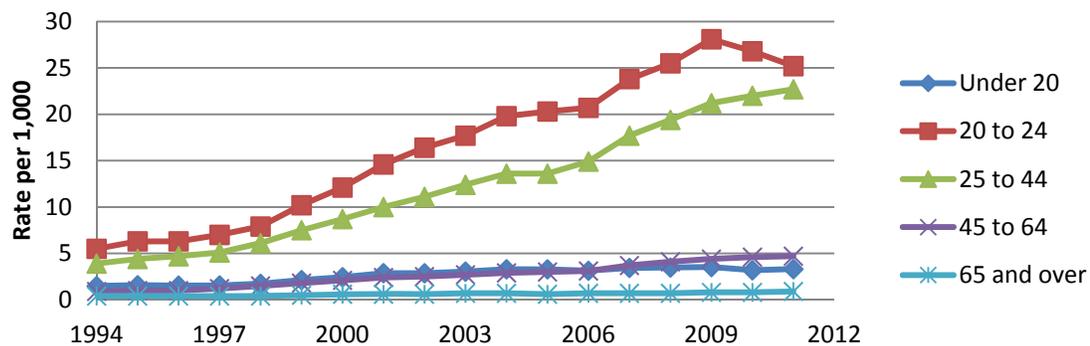


\*Rates age-adjusted using the 2000 standard population

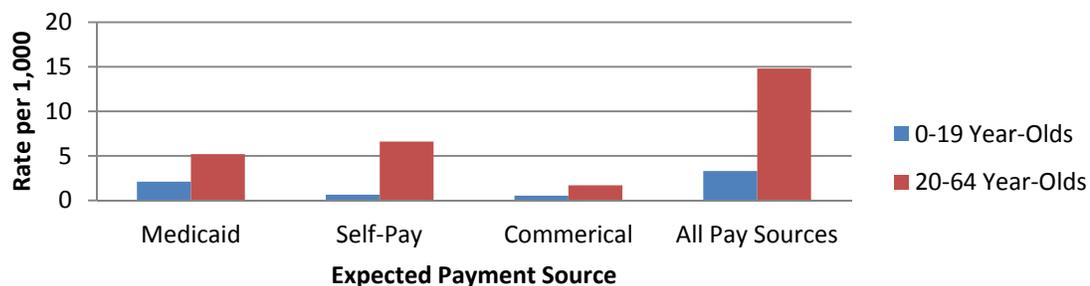
Figure 2 shows that the highest rate for dental-related ED visits was among 20 to 24-year-olds each year, followed by 25 to 44-year-olds and the increase in rates is steeper for these groups across time. Between 1994 and 2011, there was a 358% increase in rates for 20 to 24-year-olds and a 482% increase in rates for 25 to 44-year-olds; this is much higher than the rates of increase observed in other age groups. Rates for individuals under 20 and individuals 45 years and older were consistently lower each year than for adults 20 to 44 years old.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 3 shows that in 2011, most of the ED visits for dental complaints were among adults aged 20 to 64 years. For this group, “self-pay” was the most common expected payment source followed by Medicaid. Medicaid was the most common expected pay source among individuals under age 20 followed by “self-pay”; it is important to note that the majority of individuals eligible for MO Health Net dental benefits are under age 20. The majority of ED visits for individuals over 65 years had an expected payment source of Medicare.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 2. ED Visit Rates for Dental Complaints by Age Group and Year, Missouri Residents 1994-2011**



**Figure 3. ED Visit Rates\* for Dental Complaints by Payment Source and Age, Missouri Residents 2011**



\*Rates age-adjusted using the 2000 standard population

Inpatient hospitalizations for dental complaints also occur. In 2011, 548 such visits were observed, which were associated with 1,790 days of inpatient care and over \$12.2 million in charges reported by Missouri hospitals. In contrast with ED visits, the most common expected pay source for dental-related inpatient visits was commercial insurance, followed by Medicaid and Medicare.<sup>2</sup>

Combined, it is estimated that nearly \$30 million in charges for ED and inpatient visits for dental complaints occurred in 2011, which must be paid by MO Health Net, Medicare, commercial insurers, citizens, and hospitals.<sup>2</sup> This is especially alarming because the majority of these problems could have been prevented or treated in dental offices.<sup>1</sup>

## References

1. The Pew Center on the States. Issue Brief, A Costly Destination: Hospital Care Means States Pay Dearly, February 2012.
2. Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, Missouri Information for Community Assessment, MICA. Health.mo.gov/MICA, Accessed October 21, 2013.