



Brush Up on Oral Health

Finding Oral Health Care

To stay healthy, it's important for pregnant people and children to get oral health care. For some, it's hard to find. Common barriers to finding care include cost, not being enrolled in or eligible for Medicaid or the state Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), difficulty finding a dental office or clinic, and lack of time.

This issue of Brush Up on Oral Health talks about why regular dental visits are important and offers tips for Head Start staff to help pregnant people and parents find and use oral health care.



Why Regular Dental Visits Are Important

- **Promoting good oral health.** During dental visits, oral health providers ask questions to learn about the oral health practices of a child or pregnant person. Answers to questions about the use of fluoride toothpaste, eating and feeding practices, and whether the pregnant person or the child drinks fluoridated tap water can help providers deliver tailored care and education to promote oral health.
- **Teaching the value of good oral health.** Early dental visits teach a child that oral health is important. A child who is taken for dental visits early in life is likely to have a positive experience and a good attitude about dental visits. Pregnant people who get oral health care are more likely to take their child to get oral health care.
- **Finding oral health problems early.** One goal of dental visits is to find and treat little problems before they become big ones. Tooth decay can be stopped or managed if it is caught early. Treating problems early keeps oral disease from getting worse and costs less than treatment would later. Treating tooth decay in pregnant people is also important because the bacteria that cause tooth decay can be passed from mother to baby after the baby is born.

Tips for Head Start Staff to Help Pregnant People and Parents Find and Use Oral Health Care

- **Find out if the pregnant person or child has insurance.** Medicaid and CHIP pay for oral health care for children enrolled in these public insurance plans. Some, but not all, state

Medicaid programs pay for oral health care for pregnant people. Head Start staff can direct pregnant people and parents to Medicaid and CHIP program officers or others who can determine if they qualify for public insurance. For pregnant people or children that are not eligible for public insurance, private insurance may be available through their state [health insurance marketplace](#).

- **Work with a family service worker or case manager to find care.** Family service workers and case managers often know of local oral health professionals or clinics that treat pregnant people and children who are eligible for Medicaid or CHIP. Also, the family service worker or case manager can help pregnant people and parents overcome problems with making and keeping dental appointments.
- **Use online databases to find care.** Online databases, such as [Find a Dentist](#), list clinics and oral health providers who are eligible for Medicaid or CHIP.
- **Coach parents on how to talk with oral health providers.** Pregnant people and parents may be uneasy about calling a dental office or clinic to set up an appointment. They may also be unsure about what questions to ask or what information to share about their own or their child's oral health. Head Start staff can help pregnant people and parents practice how to make an appointment or talk about their oral health issues before they call or visit the dental office or clinic. [Questions to Ask When Looking for a Dental Office](#) is a good resource to use for coaching pregnant people and parents.

Find a Dentist

Use the Dentist Locator to find a dentist in your community who sees children and accepts Medicaid and CHIP.

Required *

* Select a State

* Benefit Plan

Search by Address, Zip Code

Search

[FIND A DENTIST IN YOUR STATE](#)

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CHILDREN & FAMILIES



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