Good oral health is important to children’s and adolescents’ overall health and well-being. As you interact with students and parents, you can influence their lives in important ways by teaching them about oral health.
Most oral health problems can be prevented. Here are some tips for promoting oral health with students and their parents:

- Conduct an oral health assessment on students by asking them about their personal oral hygiene practices (e.g., brushing and flossing their teeth).
- Add prompts to problem list (print or electronic records) that remind health professionals to ask students about their oral health and provide education.
- Offer preventive oral health care services (e.g., fluoride varnish) delivered by oral health and non-oral-health professionals (based on licensure requirements and state practice acts).
- Stress the importance of good oral hygiene, including brushing teeth with fluoridated toothpaste at least twice a day (in the morning and at night) and flossing at least once a day, preferably before brushing at night.
- Teach students what a healthy mouth looks like, how to recognize early signs of oral disease, and what can be done to reverse or treat oral disease.
- Encourage students to drink water throughout the day instead of sweetened beverages like sports drinks, fruit drinks, and pop (soda).
- Encourage students to wear seatbelts when riding in motor vehicles and mouth guards and other protective gear when participating in physical activities or sports such as biking, skateboarding, or in-line skating or when playing baseball, basketball, football, hockey, or soccer.
- Discourage students from obtaining oral piercings and wearing mouth jewelry that can result in chipped teeth, gum recession, and infections.
- Conduct outreach to parents to improve their knowledge and understanding of the importance of oral health, oral hygiene, healthy eating practices, and regular dental visits.

Children and adolescents with poor oral health may have many other problems:

- Developing infections from tooth decay and/or gum disease, which could lead to other serious health problems.
- Difficulty chewing food, which could result in poor nutrition and, in turn, impaired physical development.
- Speech problems.
- Difficulty concentrating and learning, and absence from school because they are in pain.
- Having psychological problems such as low self-esteem, and being at high risk for social stigma because of decayed teeth and chronic bad breath.
- Having fewer opportunities in life, compared to their peers with good oral health.
Tips for incorporating oral health into the school setting and working with others in the community:

• Offer continuing education for clinic staff to improve their knowledge and understanding of oral health, disease prevention, and health promotion.

• Place educational materials, such as brochures and posters, in the clinic waiting area and in hallways.

• Promote oral health during national observation months (e.g., National Cancer Awareness Month, National Children’s Dental Health Month, National Health Literacy Month, National Nutrition Month).

• Collaborate with members of the local oral health community, and establish referral agreements.

• Become involved in local and state oral health coalitions.

• Work with school administrators and teachers to establish classroom policies that promote oral health and overall health (e.g., using nonfood rewards and holding healthy celebrations).

• Partner with school personnel (e.g., food service director; health, home economics, and physical education teachers) to teach students about making healthy eating choices.

By helping children and adolescents achieve good oral health, you can make a big difference in their lives—both now and in the future!
Resources for Families

American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry
Parent Resource Center—http://www.aapd.org/parents

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Dental Association
Dental Emergencies—http://www.ada.org/370.aspx

American Dental Hygienists’ Association

American Dietetic Association
Nutrition for Kids and Teens—http://www.eatright.org/Public/content.aspx?id=5530

The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Oral Health

National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research
Finding Dental Care—http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/FindingDentalCare

National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center
Resource Highlights: Children, Adolescents, and Families
http://www.mchoralhealth.org/highlights/families.html

WebMD


This publication was produced by the National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center supported under its grant (H47MC00048) from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.


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