

Be an Oral Health Champion: How School-Based Clinic Staff Can Help Students Achieve Good Oral Health



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.



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.



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.



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

Oral Health Initiative for Families—<http://www.aap.org/commpeps/dochs/oralhealth/audience-families.cfm>

American Dental Association

Dental Emergencies—<http://www.ada.org/370.aspx>

Oral Health Topics—<http://www.ada.org/365.aspx>

Oral Piercing—<http://www.ada.org/3090.aspx>

American Dental Hygienists' Association

Oral Health Tips—<http://www.adha.org/oralhealth/index.html>

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

Children's Dental Health Needs and School-Based Services: A Fact Sheet—<http://www.healthinschools.org/News-Room/Fact-Sheets/DentalHealth.aspx>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Oral Health

Children's Oral Health—<http://www.cdc.gov/OralHealth/topics/child.htm>

National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research

Educational Resources—<http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/EducationalResources>

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

Oral Health Guide—<http://www.webmd.com/oral-health/guide/default.htm>



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National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center
Georgetown University
Box 571272
Washington, DC 20057-1272
(202) 784-9771 • (202) 784-9777 fax
E-mail: OHRCinfo@georgetown.edu
Website: <http://www.mchoralhealth.org>

