

Introduction

Tooth decay (dental caries) among children is a serious public health concern. In 2000, the U.S. Surgeon General published a landmark report, *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General*, which highlights the magnitude of the problem.¹ The report notes that tooth decay is one of the most common diseases among children and adolescents ages 5 to 17, occurring far more frequently than asthma or hay fever. Recent studies have found that the rates of tooth decay among children ages 2 to 6 are increasing. These studies have also found that children from families with low incomes experience higher rates of decay than children whose families have higher incomes.²

Oral Health for Maryland's Kids: A Head Start Teacher's Guide for Creating Healthy Smiles was developed to help Head Start teachers instill positive oral health knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in children and their families. The curriculum serves as an introduction to good oral health habits for children. Through interactive classroom activities, children will discover that keeping their mouths healthy helps them keep their bodies healthy, as well.

The lesson plans in this curriculum are designed for use as units. Each lesson plan builds on the next, providing a base upon which to understand why teeth are important, how tooth decay develops, how tooth decay and oral injuries can be prevented, and who can help children keep their mouths healthy.

Each lesson plan in the curriculum contains

- Learning objectives
- Background information for teachers
- Head Start domains and elements
- Special instructions
- A description of the main lesson plan
- A list of materials needed to conduct the lesson
- Questions to check children's knowledge and understanding to assess whether learning objectives have been met

Optional small group supplemental/enrichment activities are included in each lesson plan. A newsletter for parents is available for each lesson. The newsletters are designed to increase parents' knowledge and understanding of oral health and encourage them to reinforce the concepts in the curriculum with their children, and to facilitate the learning process with activities the family can do at home.

Designed primarily for use by Head Start teachers, *Oral Health for Maryland's Kids: A Head Start Teacher's Guide for Creating Healthy Smiles* is a teaching tool that can also be used by pre-kindergarten teachers, dentists, dental hygienists, physicians, nurse practitioners, and other education, health, and social service professionals.





References

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Resources Used to Develop the Curriculum

The curriculum was designed in accordance with national and state standards that include

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