

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

UPDATE ON ORAL HEALTH SERVICES

**Presented to
Governor Phil Bredesen
and
Tennessee Dental Association
May 15, 2009**

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Commissioner**

I.

INTRODUCTION

This report is provided in response to Tennessee Code Annotated 68-1-303(b), which requires the Commissioner of Health, to provide an annual report to the Governor and the Tennessee State Dental Association (TDA) on the work done by and under the commissioner in regards to distribution of literature throughout the state regarding the proper way to care for the teeth.

The mission of the Department of Health is to protect, promote, and improve the health of the residents of Tennessee. In advancement of this goal, the Department's Oral Health Services Section (OHS) operates on the fundamental principles of preventing and controlling oral diseases through organized community efforts. Statewide school-based dental programs have been expanded to offer high-risk populations preventive services to include sealants, oral health education, screenings to identify children with unmet dental needs, referrals for these children, and follow-up on those children with urgent needs. Comprehensive dental services for children and emergency dental care to adults, unable to access care in the private system, are provided in fixed facilities located in rural health departments statewide. In an effort to improve access to dental services for high risk children in underserved areas, the Tennessee Department of Health operates 3 mobile dental clinics. These mobile clinics are providing comprehensive dental services at school sites.

II.

ORAL HEALTH

A. Oral Disease Prevention

1. *Community Water Fluoridation*

The Oral Health Services Section continues its proactive statewide community water fluoridation program. Approximately, 93.7 percent of persons who drink water from community water systems in Tennessee are receiving the benefits of optimally fluoridated water compared with only 69.2 percent nationally. This state continues to be a leader in community water fluoridation having surpassed Healthy People 2000 and Healthy People 2010 national fluoridation targets of 75 percent.

The Oral Health Services Section, in conjunction with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, Division of Water Supply provides technical expertise and support to ensure that the fluoride content of the water supply is maintained at an optimal level of one part fluoride to one million parts water (1ppm).

The National Fluoridation Training School located at the Fleming Training Center in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, operates with resources from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the Department of Health and Human Services. Basic and advanced engineering courses in water fluoridation are provided at this training site to personnel involved with fluoridation programs from across the nation and around the world.

In response to a small but vocal group of opponents of community water fluoridation, the Tennessee Department of Health has worked with other partners including the TDA to educate the public as well as water plant operators about the safety and effectiveness of community water fluoridation.

2. *Fluoride Varnish Initiative*

Tennessee Code Annotated 63-5-109(14) allows registered nurses and nurse practitioners to apply fluoride varnish to at risk underserved persons in public health clinics.

The Oral Health Services Section continues to conduct programs such as **Cavity Free in Tennessee**. This program targets children 0-5 years of age being seen in health department medical clinics for preventive dental services. Nursing staff screen these children and refer them to dental providers in addition to applying fluoride varnish twice yearly.

During Fiscal 2008, 10,978 at risk children have been screened, referred, and had fluoride varnish applied by nursing staff in Tennessee Department of Health medical clinics.

B. Dental Services

1. *Public Health Dental Clinical Facilities*

The Department of Health offers comprehensive dental services to children and emergency care to adults on a sliding fee scale basis according to income. Dental services are available at 54 local health department clinics located in 53 rural counties across the state. Dental services are typically offered 1 to 5 days per week.

2. *School-Based Dental Prevention Project (SBDPP)*

This program is a statewide comprehensive preventive program involving dental screenings, referrals and follow-up for dental care, oral hygiene education, and sealants. SBDPP targets children in grades K-8 in schools with 50% or more free and reduced lunch programs. During Fiscal Year 2008, more than 137,000 children received dental screenings and more than 300,000 sealants were placed on approximately 54,000 children in 333 schools.

3. *Mobile Dental Clinics*

In an effort to improve access to dental services for high risk children in underserved areas, the Bureau of Health Services of the Tennessee Department of Health conducts a mobile dental program. Three mobile dental clinics are located in east, central, and west Tennessee. These clinics offer comprehensive care to low-income children at school sites. During Fiscal Year 2008, a total of 224 children received over 2,765 dental services.

4. *Dental Funding Initiatives*

In FY 2007-2008, TDOH expanded the Primary Care Safety Net Grant application to address increasing adult emergency oral health needs; approximately \$203,000 of primary care safety net funds were redirected to assist in expanding the capacity of existing adult emergency dental services (i.e. extractions). A separate adult emergency dental grant opportunity totaling approximately \$500,000 was developed for FY 2008-2009 as well.

In FY 2007-2008, TDOH also allocated \$1,000,000 of one-time Health Access funding which was distributed to local and metro HDs and FQHCs for the provision of adult emergency dental services. In addition, TDOH has required rural county HDs and encouraged metro HDs with dental resources to begin providing adult emergency oral health services.

5. *Distribution of Information*

The Department of Health's website includes an Oral Health Services site that provides a broad range of information to public health professionals, parents, community leaders, and the general public. The web site address for Oral Health Services is <http://health.state.tn.us/oralhealth/index.html>.

Staff, in all of the Department's dental programs, distributes literature and educational information to individuals served. This information addresses a wide variety of preventive dental topics such as the importance of oral health and proper oral hygiene techniques. Requests for oral health information from agencies and the public are responded to and information provided by staff at the local, regional and Central Office level.