

Fact Sheet

Healthy Teeth and Gums

Dental disease is the nation's leading chronic disease of children and dental disease is largely preventable. Prevention is relatively inexpensive. In 1999, the average cost of treating one tooth with a dental sealant was \$29, compared to the average cost of \$65.09 for one "silver" filling.

Lack of insurance, low family income and low parental education level are significantly associated with the lack of preventive dental care.

Tennessee Data

As of FY 2004, 636,600 children and youth ages 21 and younger utilized TennCare (According to the Bureau of TennCare Annual Report 2004-2005).

- The school based dental prevention program is designed to target preventive services to school with 50% or more free and reduced lunch population.
- The number of participants in the TennCare dental provider network has doubled since 2002. An estimated 25% of all practicing Tennessee dentists are actively participating in the program, and 86% of participating dentists are accepting new patients, indicating additional capacity within Tennessee's existing dental network (TennCare Dental Report, October 1, 2002-September 30, 2003).
- As a result of greater dentist participation in the TennCare program, patient travel time to the dentist has decreased significantly - average distance from an enrollee to a participating dentist is approximately four miles.
- During FY 2007, school based dental prevention services were delivered in all 13 regions of the state. Data show that 139,390 children had dental screenings. Of these, 35,109 children were referred for unmet dental needs. This is a referral rate of 25% (Statewide Oral Health Prevention Report).
- Comprehensive preventive services (including all aspects of the preventive program) were provided in 365 schools. Full dental exams were conducted on 69,530 children by a licensed dentist. Of the children receiving full dental exams, 34,352 were on TennCare.
- A total number of 294,191 teeth were sealed on 52,580 children.
- Approximately 168,374 children received oral health education programs at their schools by

a public health hygienist.

Best Practices

Preventive oral health is integral to general health and means much more than healthy teeth.

Below are several areas of concern:

- Good nutrition and diet habits: Many teens are not receiving the benefits of fluoridated water because they are drinking bottled water, and sugared carbonated sodas and sports drinks may contribute to tooth decay.
- Oral piercing: Oral piercing can cause infection, chipped or cracked teeth and interference with dental X-rays.
- Tobacco use: Using spit tobacco, also known as “chew” or “smoke” can result in gum recession, tooth decay, oral lesions and oral cancers as well as nicotine addiction.
- Sports injuries and protective mouth gear: About one third of all dental injuries and approximately 19 percent of head and face injuries are sports-related. The American Dental Association recognizes the preventive value of orofacial protectors and endorses the use of orofacial protectors by all participants in recreational and sports activities with a significant risk of injury at all levels of competition (American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 2002).
- Eating disorders: Anorexia and bulimia also can result in damage to teeth. Poor nutritional intake associated with anorexia means a loss of calcium. Stomach acids from the constant vomiting symptomatic of bulimia erode the enamel on the teeth. Experts have suggested the following steps as a start to improving access to oral health services for adolescents.

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- Improve access to dental care by expanding preventive care to poor inner-city and rural youth through school-based programs.

- Improve Medicaid coverage for patients and reimbursements for dentists, and provide incentives for dentists to practice in underserved areas.
- Extend dental office hours or provide an on-call service to answer questions.

2010 Objectives

Increase Access to Dental Care

- By 2010, increase the proportion of Medicaid eligible 3 to 20 year-olds who access dental services to 80%, from the 2003 baseline of 46%.

Reduce Dental Decay

- By 2010, establish baseline data on the proportion of adolescents with untreated decay in their permanent teeth.

Websites

American Dental Association
www.ada.org

Bureau of TennCare Annual Report 2004-2005
<http://tennessee.gov/tenncare/forms/annual05.pdf>

National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center
www.mchoralhealth.org

Statewide Oral Health Prevention Report, July 1, 2005-June 30, 2006
<http://health.state.tn.us/oralhealth/annual.htm#mobile>

Tennessee Department of Health
<http://www.state.tn.us/health/>

TennCare, Dental Office
http://www.state.tn.us/tenncare/dental/dental_index.htm

TennCare Dental Report October 1, 2002- September 30, 2003
<http://tennessee.gov/tenncare/forms/100604.pdf>

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Interventions to Prevent Dental Caries, Oral and Pharyngeal Cancers, and Sports-Related Craniofacial Injuries. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 23(1S), 21-54. Retrieved May 13, 2008, from <http://www.thecommunityguide.org/oral/oral-ajpm-ev-rev.pdf>