

Cavity Free

In

Tennessee

Early Childhood Caries Prevention  
A Fluoride Varnish Program for Public Health Nurses

# Mission Statement

## Oral Health Services

The Division of Oral Health Services (OHS) of the Tennessee Department of Health (TDH) continues to conduct programs to prevent oral diseases, educate the public regarding the value of optimal oral health, screen and refer patients for early detection and prompt treatment of disease, provide dental care for segments of the population unable to access care through the private sector, and conduct programs in research and evaluation as resources permit.

Oral diseases are among the most prevalent health problems in Tennessee. Oral diseases affect a significant number of children and adolescents in every county in the state. Population-based surveys reveal that certain segments of the population (low socioeconomic groups, minorities, and those living in fluoride-deficient communities) are at a high risk for oral diseases and are the least likely to access care in the private sector.

The program's goal is a component of the Department's overall goal to promote, protect, maintain, and improve the health of the population of the state. In accomplishing this goal, the Division of Oral Health Services provides programs for the prevention of oral disease and to educate the public regarding the value of good oral health. In addition, the program identifies those without access to dental care and attempts to assure basic care as well as care for acute dental conditions.

# Preface

Legislation was introduced in the 103<sup>rd</sup> session of the Tennessee General Assembly by the Tennessee Department of Health as part of Governor Bredesen's Administrative Legislative Package. That legislation amended the Dental Practice Act to allow registered nurses and nurse practitioners to apply fluoride varnish to underserved populations in public health clinics. It was signed into law May 17, 2004 and became effective July 1, 2004. The target group for this program is 0 – 5 years of age although any child would benefit from the application of fluoride varnish.

*Cavity Free in Tennessee* is an early childhood caries (ECC) prevention program for public health nurses.

Anyone who becomes involved in this project should share that enthusiasm as you will be creating a lifelong foundation for oral health, making a difference...one child at a time.

Good oral health must be established early in childhood. This may be accomplished by early intervention. This project emphasizes the importance of the partnership between medical and dental professionals to accomplish this goal.

We all know about the "ripple effect". *Cavity Free In Tennessee* will have a ripple effect beginning with the infant and carrying through the adult life. In preventing the beginning of decay, we prevent the long term effects of decay...both treated and untreated.

# Program Overview

At the end of the training session, the participant will have an understanding of the cause and effect of dental decay, particularly as it relates to children. This program emphasizes the epidemic, Early Childhood Caries (ECC). *Cavity Free in Tennessee* demonstrates the need to bring two health professionals together to begin to change the trend of ECC.

Further, the participant will have a better understanding of their role as it relates to the prevention and intervention of ECC. The participant will learn the risk factors associated with ECC. Public health nurses in Tennessee are seeing the target population, children 0 – 5 years old who are TennCare recipients. This same population is rarely seen in the dental office. The opportunity to refer patients for further dental care is vital.

The course will review the process of an oral screening and give definition to the distinct difference between the terms *screening* and *examination*. It is imperative that the course participant recognize the difference and understand that an oral screening is sufficient for determining the need for fluoride varnish.

In conclusion, the protocol for fluoride varnish will be reviewed and then demonstrated when appropriate. Minimally, each participant will apply fluoride varnish to their own teeth to witness the ease of application, taste, and the quickness with which the varnish solidifies on the tooth surface. The participant will also be able to see the varnish as it appears on the tooth surface.

In conclusion, it will then be demonstrated the ease with which the varnish may be removed from the tooth surface. Each applicant will remove the varnish as instructed.