



## Working with Parents to Improve Access to Oral Health Care

The following tips are intended to help ensure that pregnant women, infants, and children (including children with special health care needs) enrolled in Head Start receive oral health care.

### Ongoing Source of Continuous, Accessible Care

*Program Performance Standard 1304.20(a)(1)(i)*

- Talk to parents and review health histories and other records to determine whether children have a “dental home” (a continuous, accessible source of care) that will remain available after the child leaves your program.
- If a child does not have a dental home, help parents obtain a source of care by doing the following:
  - Seek assistance from your Health Services Advisory Committee to identify oral health professionals and sources of funding for oral health care.
  - Work with local agencies to determine a child’s eligibility for public assistance programs (for example, Medicaid or the State Children’s Health Insurance Program) or sources of funding for oral health care, and help families enroll in these programs or obtain such funding.
  - Give parents a list of local dentists who will provide care to infants and children enrolled in Head Start.

### Recommended Schedule of Preventive and Primary Care Visits

*Program Performance Standards 1304.20(a)(1)(ii-iv)*

- If a child is not up to date on the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment schedule of age-appropriate preventive and primary care (as determined by an oral health professional), help parents schedule a dental appointment to bring the child up to date.
- Provide clear and concise messages to parents about scheduling dental appointments on a regular basis to improve and/or maintain oral health.
- Discuss with parents arrangements for dental appointments (where their child will be seen, who will see their child, the appointment time, how they will get to the appointment, and who will pay for services).
- Help parents understand patients’ rights and responsibilities (for example, scheduling, keeping, and/or canceling appointments; what information to bring to the dental office; what to expect from oral health professionals; how to prepare their child for dental appointments).
- Counsel families who have questions or anxieties about oral health care. Arrange a field trip to a dental office for children to introduce them to the office environment and equipment. Accompany families to dental appointments if necessary.
- Help families in arranging transportation, interpretation services (for families with limited English proficiency), and child care for siblings.
- Implement a process (for example, reminder phone calls or postcards) to ensure that parents schedule and keep dental appointments and reschedule canceled appointments.
- Work with parents to ensure that children are examined and diagnosed, a treatment plan is developed and explained, and necessary treatment is completed by the end of the program year.



### Family Partnerships

*Program Performance Standard 1304.40(c)(1)(ii)*

- Help pregnant women access comprehensive oral health care immediately after enrollment in your program. Care consists of health promotion and treatment, including dental examinations on a schedule determined by oral health professionals as early in the pregnancy as possible.
- If resources are limited, work with dental access programs or safety net dental clinics to obtain free or reduced-cost care for pregnant women.

## Education

*Program Performance Standards 1304.40(f)(1) and 1304.40(f)(2)(i-iii)*

- Teach parents the importance of oral health care, including age-appropriate preventive measures, early detection and referral, treatment, and follow-up care.
- Consider parents' attitudes, cultures, languages, beliefs, fears, and educational levels when developing and providing oral health education.
- Keep health messages to parents simple, consistent, and positive.
- Use a variety of methods (for example, guest speakers, newsletters, hands-on experiences) to help parents learn about oral health and acquire skills to prevent oral disease.
- Encourage parents to assume responsibility for their child's oral health care (for example, teach parents to brush their child's teeth daily).
- Encourage parents to model good oral health behaviors (for example, brushing their teeth, visiting a dentist, eating healthy foods).



## Community Partnerships

*Program Performance Standard 1304.41(a)(2)(i)*

- Provide parents with opportunities to have a “voice.” Involve them in your Health Services Advisory Committee and other community partnerships to promote oral health concepts and address oral health issues.

## Sources

Administration for Children and Families. 2001. *Head Start and Partners Forum on Oral Health*. Washington, DC: Administration for Children and Families.

Administration for Children and Families, Head Start Bureau. *Program Performance Standards and Other Regulations*. In Administration for Children and Families, Head Start Bureau [Web site]. Cited March 12, 2003; available at [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/performance/index.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/performance/index.htm).

Edelstein BL. 2000. Access to dental care for Head Start enrollees. *Journal of Public Health Dentistry* 60(3):221–229.

## Resources

Head Start Bureau

Web site: [www2.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb](http://www2.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb)

Head Start Information and Publication Center

Web site: [www.headstartinfo.org](http://www.headstartinfo.org)

National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center

Web site: [www.mchoralhealth.org](http://www.mchoralhealth.org)

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