

School-based Oral Health

Children in Colorado

25,000 children miss at least one day of school every year because of toothaches. Children with toothaches are four times more likely to have lower grade-point averages.

Impact

Unaddressed tooth decay impacts overall health and may result in:

- chronic pain
- problems eating
- problems sleeping
- missed school
- academic challenges.

A healthy mouth also helps children eat nutritious foods, smile, and speak.

Inequities

Cavities are known to affect children of low-income families and persons of color at twice the rate of children overall; they are less likely to receive preventive dental care that could mitigate the health consequences of inequitable prevention.



Oral Health is a critical component of whole-child health. Cavities are nearly 100% preventable, yet they are the most common disease of childhood.

Oral health services in schools protect students from the harmful consequences of tooth decay (e.g., cavities), decrease the barriers to accessing dental care, prevent missed school hours, and improve school readiness.

BY THE NUMBERS

4 in 10 Four in ten Colorado children have tooth decay by the time they reach Kindergarten.



25,000

children miss at least one day of school every year because of toothaches.



FOUR TIMES

Children with toothaches are four times more likely to have lower grade-point averages.



15%

of all children have untreated decay.



By third grade, 64% of Colorado children in low-income schools experience cavities.



Find out more on the back side of this sheet or by visiting the Smart Mouths Smart Kids website at <https://smartmouthssmartkids.org> or by scanning the QR code.

School-based Oral Health

What can my school do?

Schools can establish partnerships to bring vital preventive oral health care where students live, learn, and play. Establishing a school-based oral health program to provide preventive services in schools can increase access to students and families who face barriers to accessing dental care. School-based oral health programs can provide services to help prevent and/or reduce tooth decay, increase students' overall oral and whole body health, identify dental problems and provide referrals to treatment to decrease missed school hours.

What might services look like in my school?

School-based oral health services operate within a school setting either using mobile dental equipment or a fixed site. School-based health services can vary greatly depending on the site and it is possible that a medical clinician, school nurse, dental clinician, and/or community partners may offer some or all of the services listed below.



What oral health services are offered in schools?

The types of preventive services provided can vary. All four of the following services are examples offered by a school-based oral health program:

- Oral Health Education/Instruction teaches children, their families, and school staff crucial oral health information and skills to prevent cavities (virtually or in-person) and can be provided by administrators, school-based health center staff, or other school staff.
- Screenings are a vital opportunity for a medical, dental, or other health care professional to look in the mouth to evaluate oral health needs and identify concerns, and provide referral.
- Fluoride Varnish is a sticky substance that is painted on the teeth of children in all grades by a medical or dental professional. It is a safe and effective way to prevent cavities or slow the growth of cavities.
- Sealants are applied by dental professionals and are thin coatings painted on the chewing surfaces of teeth that can prevent cavities for many years by blocking out germs and food.

Clinicians offering school-based oral health services may be able to bill insurance for the students they see, or offer services at no or low costs for families without insurance.

Getting started! Smart Mouths Smart Kids Toolkit

Smart Mouths Smart Kids (SMSK) is a toolkit provided by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment to help develop, implement, and/or maintain school-based oral health services. SMSK resources include:



Data

- Identify needs in your community through data dashboards



Starting up

- Feasibility calculator
- Developing a business plan
- Sample forms, education materials



Sustainability

- Gathering documentation
- Sustainability guidance

For more information, please contact:

Robyn Maestas, Child and School Oral Health Coordinator
robyn.maestas@state.co.us



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