



Dental Public Health Activities Descriptive Summaries

Practice Number: 19003
Submitted By: Kansas Head Start Association
Submission Date: May 2005
Last Updated: May 2005

Kansas Head Start Association Early Head Start Oral Health Initiative

Kansas Head Start Association (KHSa) has developed and implemented a systematic approach to prevent oral disease in infants and toddlers enrolled in Early Head Start (EHS). KHSa Head Start members recognize that oral disease is preventable and treatable, and that early intervention works. The goal is to keep children cavity-free through prevention and education services for parents, staff and community members. This initiative has the potential to reach more than 1,200 children in 34 Kansas counties. This two-year initiative (July 1, 2003 to June 3, 2005) received \$52,000, funded by a grant from United Methodist Health Ministry Fund of Kansas. Services include periodic screening for signs of dental decay, fluoride varnish applications, and age-appropriate oral health hygiene practices and materials. In addition, families will receive thorough education, training, and motivation to: (a) conduct regular visual screenings of their children's teeth, (b) to serve "teeth healthy" nutritional foods, and (c) to practice oral health hygiene for their children and themselves. The initiative also serves pregnant women enrolled in the Early Head Start programs. Each Early Head Start program is coordinating oral health services with community health providers: dentists and dental hygienists, pediatricians and nurses, plus health departments and WIC Clinics. To develop the protocol for this initiative, KHSa used the research summaries and recommendations presented at the Kansas Head Start Oral Health Forum and published in the Journal of Public Health Dentistry, Summer of 2000. In addition, Dr. Michael Kanellis, University of Iowa, serves as the advisor. The Prevention Protocol for Infants & Toddlers is:

- Early and periodic oral screening
- Detailed oral health instruction for families: knowledge, skills, habits
- Detailed instruction about "teeth healthy" nutrition
- Fluoride varnish application 3 times per year
- Tooth brushing 2 times each day with fluoride toothpaste when teeth appear
- Referral to a dentist at age one

By using a variety of strategies that have been tested in formal research projects, Early Head Start Management, home visitors, and child care partners have documented the changes in their practices, which include an initial and periodic oral health screening, "Lift the Lip" training for families, oral health nutrition education, and engagement of community dentists to see infants and toddlers in their practices. The Oral Health Initiative recruited 12 EHS programs serving pregnant women, infants and toddlers, reaching approximately 500 low-income families in 29 Kansas counties. The most significant current statistics include:

- 81% of parents conducted "Lift the Lip" screenings each month;
- 72% of children enrolled in study left EHS cavity free;
- 94% of home visitors and health specialists provided parent education and guidance;
- 62% of children referred to a dentist for treatment received treatment;
- 26% of the children received fluoride varnish applications;
- Each EHS program participating recruited at least one dentist or dental practice to examine and treat pregnant women, infants and toddlers, an increase of 100% over five years ago.

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