



Dental Public Health Activities Descriptive Summaries

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New Mexico's Oral Health Survey

Prior to 2000, New Mexico had not conducted a statewide oral health needs assessment survey on children and did not have health district level or county-specific oral health data on caries experience or treatment needs of New Mexico's children. The New Mexico Department of Health (DOH), Office of Oral Health (OOH) staff conducted the 2000 Oral Health Survey (OHS), "*Make Your Smile Count.*" The OHS was based on a protocol from the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors called *Basic Screening Surveys: An Approach to Monitoring Community Oral Health*. The Office of Oral Health enlisted the expertise of a DOH epidemiologist for determining the sample size of the survey and for generating the random sampling of schools. Also, in collaboration with the DOH data management staff, data entry programs were developed. The Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors (ASTDD), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Office of Oral Health collaboratively managed the survey's data analysis.

A total of 2,181 questionnaires were returned and 2,136 third grade children completed the direct observation oral health examination. The statewide response rate for this survey was 47 percent. The survey provided oral health status data (caries experience, untreated tooth decay, sealant presence and treatment urgency) and information on access to care (experience with a toothache, time since last dental visit, reason for last dental visit, reasons why the child could not get dental care needed, and dental insurance coverage). Key survey findings showed that among 3rd grade children in New Mexico, 65 percent of the children screened had experienced tooth decay, 37 percent had untreated decay, 43 percent had at least one dental sealant, and 27 percent of the parents reported that during the last 12 months there was a time when their child needed dental care but they could not obtain the necessary care.

The survey also allowed oral health data to be stratified to provide information specific to a health district or county as well identify disparities among racial/ethnic groups in the state. The outcomes that resulted from conducting the survey and the survey's findings included development Office of Oral Health staff expertise in oral health status assessment, development of a database that provides oral health status information for the National Oral Health Surveillance System and evaluation of needs among the public health districts of the state, identification of target areas and populations with high dental needs, and guidance in seeking resources to better serve the target areas and populations identified.

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