



Dental Public Health Activities Descriptive Summaries

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Pennsylvania Epidemiological Oral Health Needs Assessment for School Children

The Pennsylvania Department of Health contracted the University of Pittsburgh to conduct an epidemiological, statewide oral health assessment. The focus of the Pennsylvania Epidemiological Oral Health Needs Assessment was to determine the oral health status and dental treatment needs of the Commonwealth's children. This assessment was the first of its kind in Pennsylvania. Over the course of nearly two years (September 1, 1998 until May 30, 2000), the University of Pittsburgh surveyed a scientifically-based and representative sample of children and their parents in grades 1, 3, 9, 11 in each of the six Commonwealth's Dental Health Districts. The assessment included a separate sampling for the big cities of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Children were given a clinical oral screening to determine: (1) prevalence of treated and untreated dental caries (DMFT and dft indices), (2) immediate treatment needs, (3) presence of dental sealants, (4) prevalence of dental fluorosis, (5) orthodontic status, (6) evidence of anterior tooth trauma, and (6) presence of other dental conditions requiring care. The parents/guardians of approximately one third of the children examined received a telephone call to gather socio-economic and access to care data. A total of 6,040 children were examined and 1,200 parents were interviewed. The cost of the study was \$377,000. The Oral Health Needs Assessment has provided reliable, specific details about the extent of the oral health problems among the state's schoolchildren, their use of the oral health care system, and evidence of the significant economic gradient that exists for dental caries. The information gathered will be used to evaluate the present oral health status of Pennsylvania schoolchildren compared to the Healthy People 2010 objectives, discover variations in oral health status between schoolchildren among the Commonwealth's different health districts, and assess socio-economic differences in oral health status and access to care. The findings will be used to develop new policies and programs to improve the oral health of schoolchildren in Pennsylvania and its six Health Services Districts. Although the survey enabled statewide and health district level comparisons to Healthy People 2010 objectives, it would likely be too expensive and labor intensive to become an ongoing surveillance model.

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