



Dental Public Health Activity Descriptive Summary

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School Based Dental Prevention Program

Since 2001, the Tennessee Department of Health, Oral Health Services has administered a statewide School-based Dental Prevention Program (SBDPP). TennCare, the state's Medicaid program, provides annual funding to the TDH to implement the program. This program consists of three main preventive components and targets grades K-8 in schools that have more than 50% free and reduced lunch. The schools are selected based upon the school lunch criteria but all students in the target school are eligible for the program.

The three program components are: (1) screenings and referral for care, (2) oral health education and outreach for TennCare, (3) full charted dental examination and dental sealant application. All children in grades K-8 are offered all three components of this program. Parents receive notification of screening results and those children with untreated decay are referred to the local health department dental clinic and the private sector. Oral health education focuses on preventive measures and oral hygiene instruction. Children who are not on TennCare but may be eligible receive information on how to apply. The program has a multi-million dollar annual budget funded by TennCare. All services are provided in the school setting using portable dental equipment and the program has about 100 staff members (dentists, dental assistants, and hygienists) statewide.

In recent school years, the full scope of program services was provided annually for approximately 63,000 children. The program has been able to provide these services to more than 30% (~300) of the 1000+ target schools and included: more than 130,900 screenings, 48,400 children receiving sealants, 270,900 teeth sealed, and 173,000 children receiving oral health education. Aggregate data is collected for the program and outcomes including monitoring decreased referral rates, sealant retention rates, and increased numbers of existing sealants. This program has generally been met with tremendous enthusiasm from teachers and school personnel.

Lessons Learned:

The fact that this program is funded on the front end and does not bill for services allows more staff time to go toward services delivery. I would recommend adding administrative support staff to any program of this type for functions that do not require a dental background such as data entry and running reports.

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