

# Dental Public Health Activity Descriptive Summary

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## School Transport Program

In attempting to address access to dental care for children in Tennessee, the School Transport Program was developed. This is a local program but is coordinated by the regional dental director. The seven rural dental directors, who are state employed dentists, coordinate the dental program in multiple counties under the direction of the State Dental Director.

The Tennessee Department of Health has dental clinics in fixed facilities located in health department settings statewide. Many of these dental clinics have partnered with local elementary schools in underserved areas to have the schools transport the children to and from the dental clinic. The school is responsible for transport as well as having someone stay with the children while in the clinic setting. Children on free and reduced lunch are eligible for this program and are not charged for the services provided. TennCare (the state's Medicaid) is billed if appropriate. After each dental visit, the children are returned to the school, along with services provided/services needed note for the parents. For dental clinics participating in the School Transport Program, usually an entire day on the clinic schedule is devoted to the program. Parental consents are obtained for transporting the child and for dental treatment. A medical history is also obtained for each child in the program. The local health department dental clinic staff and regional dental staff offer in-service training to the teaching staff so that anxiety is decreased concerning possible issues that might arise for each child treated in the clinic.

In a typical school year, approximately 15 school districts participate in the program with more than 40 schools actively involved in transporting students. The program has been successful in improving high risk children's access to dental care, reducing broken appointments for the dental clinics, and fostering better working relationships between the local health departments and school systems. No additional funding and no additional staffing are required for the School Transport Program since the service is integrated with the school systems and the Department of Health's dental clinics. Existing school and clinic staff provide the services.

### Lessons Learned:

The success of this program is based upon the partnerships formed within the school systems, good communication with the parents, and a healthy respect for minimizing missed class time for the students. The School Based Dental Prevention Program has aided this program tremendously in partnership development.

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