



O R A L H E A L T H K A N S A S

Spring, 2007

Dear Champions of Better Health for School Kids...

Quality oral health for all children and adolescents is imperative if they are going to reach their levels of optimum success in school and in life. When children's oral health suffers, so does their ability to learn and to interact with others. These are both essential to build a foundation for a quality life as an adult.

Consider these facts from Oral Health and Learning, a fact sheet produced by National Oral Health Resource Center, at Georgetown University:

- In 1995, a study reported that an estimated 51 million school hours per year were lost because of dental-related illness.
- When very young children lose teeth due to decay, they can experience a failure to thrive, impaired speech development, inability to concentrate in order to learn, and reduced self-esteem.
- Poor oral health has been related to decreased school performance, poor social relationships, and less success later in life.
- Children experiencing pain are distracted and unable to concentrate on schoolwork.

What Kansas is doing to improve school children's oral health:

Oral Health Kansas, with funding from Kansas Dental Charitable Foundation, and in partnership with Kansas Coordinated School Health Program, has developed oral health guidelines. These documents are designed to support school districts that wish to integrate oral health into school policies and classroom activities. They offer ideas and suggestions so that district and building administrators can select those that are most appropriate for their communities, teachers and students.

The documents include a list of oral health topics essential for students to learn, strategies for incorporating oral health into each of the eight components of Kansas Coordinated School Health, ideas for incorporating oral health into classroom activities, and a list of oral health curricula appropriate for all grades -- pre-k through high school.

This packet is designed for everyone who is committed to optimum oral health for school kids – teachers, principals, school nurses, parents, physicians, nurses, dentists, dental hygienists, school board members, and members of school health and wellness councils.

Here is how you can be a partner:

- Learn all you can about your school's health and wellness policies and practices. Here are areas to cover --
 - Does the school have a health and wellness school council? Is a dentist or dental hygienist on the school board, or on the school's wellness council?
 - Does the school have a policy to eliminate sugar-laden drinks and candy in the school and classroom?
 - Do the teachers incorporate oral health information in their health curriculum?
 - Does the school have an oral health screening program? If so, which grades participate? Who conducts the screening – school nurses, community dentists, and dental hygienists?
 - Does the school have a consistent, reliable referral source for dental care for children who have severe toothaches or other oral health problems but do not have a dentist of their own?
 - Have school administrators and/or classroom teachers talked about the need for dental care for children who do not have access because of financial or transportation issues?
- Talk with all the people you know who are connected to your community's schools about the need for children to have optimum oral health. Based on what you learn about the school's oral health program, and using all of the ingredients in Kansas Coordinated School Oral Health Program, suggest elements to add to what they are now doing. For example --
 - Develop an district-wide oral health plan, with a set of policies and practices, designed to prevent oral health disease or to identify it early enough to ward off serious and life-threatening illnesses
 - Select an oral health curriculum for classrooms
 - Include dental professions when students are exploring career opportunities
 - Incorporate toothbrushing and flossing in preschool, kindergarten, and primary grades, using a research based approach sitting at desks
 - Establish a school-based dental hygiene program for children qualifying for Medicaid/HealthWave and free and reduced lunch programs
- Meet with school board members and/or school district administrators; review with them a copy of the rubric: www.oralhealthkansas.org
- Send school representatives a copy of *Oral Health and Learning* from the National Oral Health Resource Center: <http://www.mchoralhealth.org/pdfs/learningfactsheet.pdf>
- Offer to address groups from local schools, such as the board, district administrative council, school nurses, school health council, and PTA/PTO
- Invite dentists, hygienists, physicians and nurses to a meeting to discuss how to ensure optimum oral health for school children and adolescents
- Create other approaches that match your style of promoting oral health in your community and your school district's style of bringing in new programs
- For more information about Kansas Coordinated School Health go to www.kshealthykids.org

Good Luck! And remember that Oral Health Kansas is ready to support your efforts with School-Based Dental Hygiene Program Start Up Kits, promotional materials, PowerPoint presentations, and free advice. Please call Marcia Manter at Oral Health Kansas: 785 235 6039 or e-mail: mmanter@oralhealthkansas.org