



Brush Up on Oral Health

Promoting Oral Health and School Readiness

School readiness begins with health because a child must be healthy to be ready to learn. School readiness depends on positive physical, social and emotional, learning, language, and cognitive development. Oral health impacts each of these areas and plays an important role in a child's school readiness.

This Brush Up on Oral Health tip sheet describes the impact of oral health on a child's ability to learn. It includes strategies and resources Head Start staff can use to promote oral health among parents and in the classroom.



The Impact of Oral Health on School Readiness

The health of a child's mouth can affect all aspects of a child's life. Children with poor oral health may:

- Have a hard time concentrating and learning because they are in pain
- Miss more school days
- Develop other serious health conditions, such as infections
- Stop smiling, cover their mouth with their hands when they speak, or withdraw from family, friends, and teachers if others comment on the appearance of their teeth

The good news is that tooth decay can be prevented. Ingredients of good oral health include brushing with fluoride toothpaste twice a day and visiting the dental office regularly. Eating healthy meals and snacks and drinking water containing fluoride are also important for good oral health.

Resources Head Start Staff Can Use to Promote Oral Health

The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness provides a variety of resources that can be used to promote oral health among parents and in the classroom:

- [**Checklist for Child Care Staff: Best Practices for Good Oral Health**](#) is a checklist with items that Head Start and child care program staff can check to show what they are doing to promote good oral health for infants, toddlers, and young children. Items not checked

can serve as goals to help staff work toward improving their practices related to foods and drinks and oral hygiene. The checklist is divided into three main categories: infants from birth to age 1, toddlers ages 1–3, and young children ages 3–5. Within each category, items to check are listed in two sub-categories: foods and drinks and oral hygiene.



- [**Healthy Children Are Ready to Learn**](#) offers information that connects school readiness to health and healthy development.
- [**Healthy Habits for Happy Smiles**](#) is a series of handouts for pregnant women and parents that provide simple tips on oral health issues. Topics include teething pain, toothbrushing, healthy drinks and snacks, fluoride, oral injuries, and dental visits.
- [**Oral Health: Tips for Health Managers**](#) identifies strategies oral health managers and other staff can use to promote good oral health habits in pregnant women and children enrolled in Head Start programs.
- [**Steps for Toothbrushing at the Table: Growing Healthy Smiles in Early Care and Education Programs**](#) is a video that provides Head Start and child care staff with information about how children can brush their teeth as a group at the table. The video shows a Head Start teacher modeling brushing at the table while the children also brush with her guidance. Instructions for how to prepare the area, clean up after brushing, and safely store toothbrushes are included. The video also shows a dentist explaining how toothbrushing with fluoride toothpaste can help prevent tooth decay.

This publication was developed with funds from cooperative agreement #90HC00022 for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, by the National Center on Health, Behavioral Health, and Safety. This publication may be duplicated for noncommercial uses without permission. This publication is in the public domain, and no copyright can be claimed by persons or organizations.



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