August 2018

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Did You Know?

- What happens during the first five years of a child's life is critical to their health, development, and ability to succeed in school and later in life.
- One in four children ages 2 to 5 have experienced tooth decay.
- Tooth decay in children is more common than asthma, hay fever, and obesity.

Oral Health and School Readiness

At Head Start, 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 issue of Brush Up on Oral Health is all about sugar. It describes the impact of oral health on a child's health and development. It includes strategies and resources Head Start staff can use to promote oral health among parents and in the classroom. A recipe for a healthy snack that can be made in a Head Start classroom or at home is also included.

Oral Health Is More Than a Pretty Smile

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 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 families and in the classroom:

- **Health Manager’s Orientation Guide: School Readiness Begins with Health!** offers information to help staff achieve the Head Start program performance standards. The oral health section in **Chapter 4, Health Topics: Delving Deeper** of the guide includes information, checklists, and other resources to help meet oral health standards.

- **Healthy Habits for Happy Smiles** offers a series of handouts for families that provide simple tips on oral health issues. Topics address oral health during pregnancy, teething pain, toothbrushing, healthy drinks and snacks, fluoride, oral injuries, and dental visits. The series is also available in **Spanish**.

- **Making the Link Between Health and School Readiness** is a tool designed to help staff understand the link between their school readiness goals and their health services plan. The section on oral health offers strategies for (1) promoting the link between oral health and school readiness to improve access to and engagement in learning, (2) building and strengthening partnerships to expand oral health services that support children’s engagement in learning and (3) developing oral health policies and procedures that promote child development.

- **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.

- **The Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center’s Oral Health webpage** offers a variety of educational resources to help staff provide oral health education to families. Topics include dental visits, fluoride, nutrition, oral health care, oral hygiene, and safety and emergency first aid. Many of the resources are also available in **Spanish**.

Cook’s Corner: Easy Salsa

Here is a delicious healthy snack that staff and children can make in a Head Start classroom or at home with their families.

**Ingredients**

- 4 cups tomatoes, chopped
- ¼ cup onion, finely chopped
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and chopped
- 1 tablespoon vinegar or lime juice
• 1 teaspoon cumin
• 1 teaspoon garlic, minced
• 1 teaspoon salt, optional

Directions
1. Place all the ingredients in a medium-size bowl and mix well.
2. Cool mixed ingredients in the refrigerator for 1 hour.
3. Serve with raw vegetables, such as cucumbers or bell peppers, and/or tortilla chips.

Makes 14 servings

Safety tip: An adult should slice the ingredients.

Contact Us

The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness welcomes your feedback on this issue, as well as your suggestions for topics for future issues. Please forward your comments to health@ecetta.info or call 866-763-6481.

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This issue was developed with funds from cooperative agreement #U44MC30806 for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, Office of Child Care, and Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, by the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness. This resource may be duplicated for noncommercial uses without permission.

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School readiness begins with health!