
School-Based Oral Health Toolkit

A Resource for School Nurses



Children's
Oral Health
Network
of Maine

Updated December 2023



School nurses have an important front line role in supporting oral health.

This Toolkit is intended to assist school nurses to provide oral health prevention and education, as well as identify an oral health model that fits within their Maine school or district.

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Children's Oral Health Data

Schools as Part of the Solution

School Oral Health Models

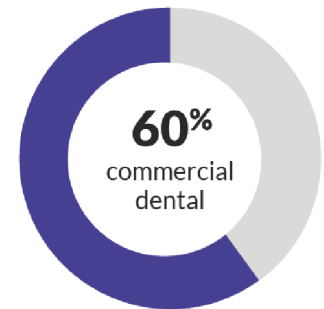
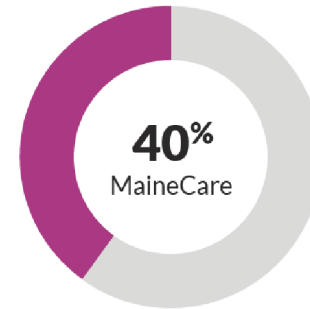
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Children's Oral Health Data

Percentage of Insured Children Under Age 21 with At Least One Preventive Dental Claim in 2020

Among consistently insured children in Maine, only 40% of children with MaineCare and 60% of children with commercial insurance had any preventive care in the last year.



Source: 2020 dental claims data from the Maine Health Data Organization's All-Payer Claims Database

Even among schools already participating in the Maine CDC's School Oral Health Program, **the percentage of students who need care immediately upon being screened has tripled from under 2% to nearly 6% since 2018.** These are students who have had more access to care than those in schools not yet providing school-based oral health services.



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Children's Oral Health Data

Dental disease is the leading chronic illness in children and is a major reason students miss school.

Regular access to dental care is necessary in the prevention of dental disease. School-based programs are an effective way to make oral health preventive services available to all children.

Access to insurance is not the only barrier to care children face. Children and families struggle to get dental care because:

- There is a shortage of dental providers in Maine
- Many dentists do not accept MaineCare
- Transportation and taking time off to go to appointments that are often far away is difficult for parents
- Negative experiences with the dental system cause fear or apprehension to bring children to the dentist
- Immigration status or language barriers can exacerbate these challenges

Schools as Part of the Solution

School oral health programs are an evidence-based way to help children get preventive oral health care. These programs remove many barriers children face, including:



Missing out on valuable class time



Challenges finding a dental provider



Financial hardship



Transportation and parents securing time off work

School Oral Health Models



Maine CDC School Oral Health Program



Mobile School-Based Preventive Programs led by Independent Practice Dental Hygienists



School-Based Health Centers

These programs do not have to operate in isolation from each other. They can be layered on top of each other to provide both a universal set of preventive services like screenings, fluoride varnish, and sealants as well as more in-depth preventive services and treatment for the students who need that level of care. For example, all students could be screened by the School Oral Health Program and independent hygienists could follow up with the students who need more care.

Maine CDC School Oral Health Program

Provides qualified health care professional OR training for the school nurse to conduct basic dental screenings and apply fluoride varnish for all students who sign up for the program.

Support provided by the School Oral Health Program:

- Orientation and ongoing guidance to local administrators and school nurses
- Limited technical assistance
- Coordination of training and/or planning
- Lists where dental care is available

The school nurse's role:

- Determine whether nurse or School Oral Health Program professional will administer the program.
- Meet with School Oral Health Program Coordinator for orientation.
- Send and collect completed consent forms to assigned support person from the School Oral Health Program.
- Assist with retrieving students and documentation on the day of services **OR** complete the screenings, fluoride varnish, and documentation if administering the program directly.
- Contact parents/caregivers if follow-up care is needed. Assistance can be provided by hygienist or School Oral Health Program Coordinator.

Financing for this program:
State funding for the School Oral Health Program ensures that this program is provided at no cost to schools or students.

Maine CDC School Oral Health Program: Next Steps

Children's Oral Health

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Contact the program administrator, MCD Global Health, to participate: sohp@mcd.org.

For more information, check out the Maine CDC School Oral Health Program guide and 2022 statement of expectations for participating schools:

https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/population-health/odh/documents/2021SOHP_Handbook.pdf

https://drive.google.com/file/d/12r8inpS94BpWb4L97neSnuRO1wQEv3F_/view?usp=sharing



School-Based Preventive Programs

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Mobile/Independent practice dental hygienists (IPDHs)

Provide a full array of preventive and early intervention services which may include:

- Oral health assessment,
- Cleanings,
- Fluoride varnish,
- Sealants,
- Referrals for follow-up care, and
- Application of medicaments shown to stop active tooth decay.

The school nurse's role:

- Distribution and collection of consent forms.
- Coordination of scheduling with dental hygienist.
- Ensuring students attend scheduled services with hygienist.
- Follow-up care coordination, as needed. Assistance can sometimes be provided by hygienist.

Financing for this program:

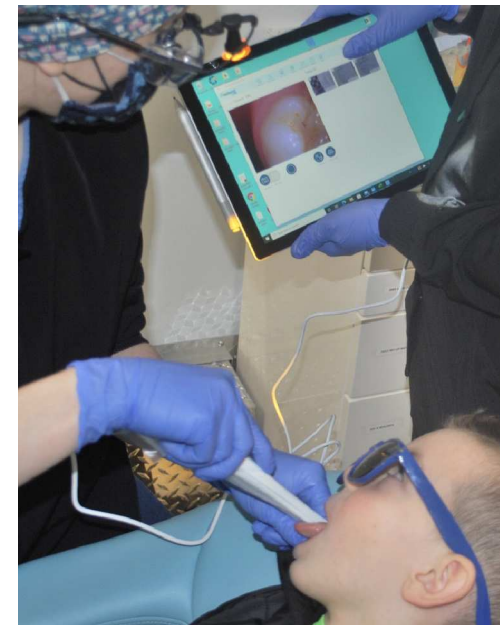
IPDHs can bill for the services they provide, and some use grant funding to fill other gaps in their budget so that these services are provided at no out-of-pocket cost to student families.

School-Based Preventive Programs: Next Steps

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Contact an independent practice dental hygienist to see if they can serve your school. COHN has a list of IPDHs who provide school services available on our website:

<https://www.maineconh.org/what-we-do/schools/connecting-schools-to-oral-health-services>



Guidelines for Mobile
Dental Care Programs
working in School
Administrative Units
<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/population-health/odh/documents/Guidelines-Mobile-providers-March-22.pdf>

School-Based Health Centers

School-Based Health Centers have regular, on-site providers at a school. Dental staff can offer services like those offered by the mobile/IPDH model with additional restorative dental services in some cases, depending on the school's clinic set-up and staffing.

Medical staff at School-Based Health Centers can also provide limited oral health services such as fluoride varnish, oral health assessment, care coordination, and triage/referral for urgent dental needs.

Financing for this program:
Setting up a SBHC is often in partnership with a local health care provider and funding may be available to help with initial equipment costs. Services can become billable and provided at no cost to student families through a combination of billing and grants available to SBHCs.

The school nurse's role:

- Referring students for services.
- Coordination with the SBHC staff as needed.

School-Based Health Centers: Next Steps

To explore setting up a School-Based Health Center at your school, reach out to the School Based Health Center staff at the Maine CDC:

- Penny Townsend (penny.townsend@maine.gov), School Based Health Center Coordinator
- Sheila Nelson (sheila.nelson@maine.gov), Adolescent and School Health Program Manager

For more information about School-Based Health Centers, check out the School-Based Health Center Alliance:

<https://www.sbh4all.org/what-we-do/school-based-health-care/>

Examples of Maine School-Based Health Centers:

Penobscot Community Health Care in Brewer Schools

<https://pchc.com/location/brewer-school-based-health-centers/>

Hometown Health Center in RSU 19

<https://hometownhealthcenter.org/locations/school-based-health-center/>

Additional Resources

Maine CDC School Oral Health Program handbook

https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/population-health/odh/documents/2021SOHP_Handbook.pdf

Maine CDC School Oral Health Program: link to downloadable brochures

<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/population-health/odh/documents/downloadable-brochures/index.shtml>

Maine Children's Oral Health Network: Data Brief

<https://www.mainecohn.org/assets/docs/2020-COHN-Data-Brief.pdf>

Maine Children's Oral Health Network: Maine Dental Access Map

<https://www.mainecohn.org/maine-dental-access-map>

Rural Health Information Hub: Rural Oral Health Program Models

<https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/oral-health/2/program-models>

Communication and language services help

<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ada/ada-civil-rights-compliance/effective-communication-language-access>

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The Children's Oral Health Network is grateful for the work of Clarissa Sabattis, Kim McNamara, and Jordyn Ritchie, nurse practitioner students at the University of Maine Fort Kent. They compiled this information to benefit Maine school nurses and their students.

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