

**TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

**UPDATE ON ORAL HEALTH SERVICES**

**Presented to  
Governor Phil Bredesen  
and  
Tennessee Dental Association**

**April 12, 2010**

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**I.**

## INTRODUCTION

This report is provided in response to Tennessee Code Annotated 68-1-303(b), which requires the Commissioner of Health, to provide an annual report to the Governor and the Tennessee Dental Association (TDA) on the work done by and under the commissioner in regards to distribution of literature throughout the state regarding the proper way to care for the teeth.

The mission of the Department of Health is to protect, promote, and improve the health of the persons living in, working in, or visiting the State of Tennessee. In advancement of this goal, the Department's Oral Health Services Section (OHS) operates on the fundamental principles of preventing and controlling oral diseases through organized community efforts. Statewide school-based dental programs have been expanded to offer high-risk populations preventive services to include sealants, oral health education, screenings to identify children with unmet dental needs, referrals for these children, and follow-up on those children with urgent needs. Comprehensive dental services for children and emergency dental care to adults, unable to access care in the private system, are provided in fixed facilities located in rural health departments statewide. In an effort to improve access to dental services for high-risk children in underserved areas, the Tennessee Department of Health operates three mobile dental clinics. These mobile clinics are providing comprehensive dental services at school sites.

## II.

### ORAL HEALTH

#### A. Oral Disease Prevention

##### 1. *Community Water Fluoridation*

The Oral Health Services Section continues its proactive statewide community water fluoridation program. Approximately 93.7 percent of persons who drink water from community water systems in Tennessee are receiving the benefits of optimally fluoridated water compared with only 69.2 percent nationally. This state continues to be a leader in community water fluoridation having surpassed Healthy People 2000 and Healthy People 2010 national fluoridation targets of 75 percent.

The Oral Health Services Section, in conjunction with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, Division of Water Supply provides technical expertise and support to ensure that the fluoride content of the water supply is maintained at an optimal level of one part fluoride to one million parts water (1ppm).

The National Fluoridation Training School located at the Fleming Training Center in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, operates with resources from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the Department of Health and Human Services. Basic and advanced engineering courses in water fluoridation are provided at this

training site to personnel involved with fluoridation programs from across the nation and around the world.

2. *Fluoride Varnish Initiative*

Tennessee Code Annotated 63-5-109(14) allows registered nurses and nurse practitioners to apply fluoride varnish to at risk underserved persons in public health clinics.

The Oral Health Services Section continues to conduct programs such as **Cavity Free in Tennessee**. This program targets children 0-5 years of age being seen in health department medical clinics for preventive dental services. Nursing staff screen these children and refer them to dental providers in addition to applying fluoride varnish twice yearly.

During Fiscal Year 2009, 13,937 at risk children have been screened, referred, and had fluoride varnish applied by nursing staff in Tennessee Department of Health medical clinics.

## **B. Dental Services**

1. *Public Health Dental Clinical Facilities*

The Department of Health offers comprehensive dental services to children and emergency care to adults on a sliding fee scale basis according to income. Dental services are available at 54 local health department clinics located in 53 rural counties across the state. Dental services are typically offered 1 to 5 days per week.

2. *School-Based Dental Prevention Project (SBDPP)*

This program is a statewide comprehensive preventive program involving dental screenings, referrals and follow-up for dental care, oral hygiene education, and sealants. SBDPP targets children in grades K-8 in schools with 50% or more free and reduced lunch programs. During Fiscal Year 2009, more than 126,000 children received dental screenings and more than 280,000 sealants were placed on approximately 51,000 children in 322 schools.

3. *Mobile Dental Clinics*

In an effort to improve access to dental services for high risk children in underserved areas, the Oral Health Services Section conducts a mobile dental program. Three mobile dental clinics are located in east, central, and west Tennessee. These clinics offer comprehensive care to low-income children at school sites. During Fiscal Year 2009, a total of 576 children received 5,394 dental services.

4. *Dental Funding Initiatives*

In Fiscal Year 2009, the Department awarded 7 grants totaling \$210,000 for emergency dental services for adults and more than 6,100 extractions were performed.

5. *Distribution of Information*

The Department of Health's website includes an Oral Health Services site that provides a broad range of information to public health professionals, parents, community leaders, and the general public. The web site address for Oral Health Services is <http://health.state.tn.us/oralhealth/index.html>.

Staff, in all of the Department's dental programs, distributes literature and educational information to individuals served. This information addresses a wide variety of preventive dental topics such as the importance of oral health and proper oral hygiene techniques. Requests for oral health information from agencies and the public are responded to and information provided by staff at the local, regional and Central Office level.