



Oral Health in Schools: Why it Matters

- It is estimated that more than 51 million school hours are lost annually due to dental-related illnesses, according to a report issued by the U.S. Surgeon General in 2000.
- A 2012 study by the University of Southern California found that "children who reported having recent tooth pain were four times more likely to have a low grade point average – below the median GPA of 2.8 – when compared to children without oral pain."
- A report by the Pew Charitable Trusts states that untreated tooth decay "can cause pain and infection that may lead to difficulty eating, speaking, socializing and sleeping, as well as poor overall health."

Dental Services for School-Aged Children

28 PA Code (regulations) 23.3(a)* states "Dental examinations shall be required on original entry into school and in grades three and seven."

Schools have two options for fulfilling this requirement - a mandated dental program or a dental hygiene services program.

Mandated Dental Program:

- The mandated dental program requires the completion of dental examinations by a dentist licensed within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
- Dental hygienists may NOT complete the mandated examinations, including Public Health Dental Hygiene Practitioners (PHDHP).
- Schools choosing to use mobile dentists must ensure that the dentist is licensed within the Commonwealth, that the examinations are completed by a dentist and that examinations in the mandated grades (K/1st grade, 3rd grade and 7th grade) are provided free-of-charge to students.

Dental Hygiene Services Program:

- The dental hygiene services program utilizes a Certified School Dental Hygienist (CSDH). This program requires that a dental hygienist must have at a minimum, a Bachelor's degree, and either have an Educational Specialist Certificate issued by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, or be working towards acquiring this certificate. This individual is a professional employee of the school district.
- The CSDH is responsible for writing and maintaining the district's dental program. The program is mindfully written to address the unique needs of individual school districts.
- Dental hygiene services programs may include multiple offerings such as:
 - The mandated State dental screenings and resulting documentation and referrals
 - Follow-up on referrals and advocacy for care
 - Coordination of dental care for students by connecting their families with community resources and other support
 - The organization and operation of a school fluoride supplement program
 - Classroom dental health education
 - Preventive dental hygiene services to include: cleanings, sealants and fluoride varnish application – **IF** the CSDH is a Public Health Dental Hygiene Practitioner (PHDHP)