



City of Chicago  
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Chicago Department of  
Children and Youth Services

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**To:** Early Head Start/Head Start/Child Care Program  
Directors/Site Directors/Network Coordinators

**From:** Madeline Cancel-Hanieh *mcsh*  
Director  
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**Subject:** DAILY TOOTHBRUSHING PROGRAM POLICY

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A daily toothbrushing program ensures that children establish a daily routine for good oral health and hygiene. The following reinforces and supports the Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services' Daily Toothbrushing Program Policy in all Early Head Start/Head Start/Child Care classrooms and homes.

Oral health care practices, use of dental sealants, and fluoride for all children, along with consumption of healthy foods are addressed in Head Start Program Performance Standards 1304.20(a)(1)(ii), 1304.20(c)(3)(i)(ii), 1304.23(b)(3), 304.23(c)(5) and Program Instruction, ACF-PI-HS-06-03. Adherence to these oral health guidelines will foster positive oral health behaviors that last a lifetime.

Each Head Start program is expected to implement a daily toothbrushing program as part of their overall oral health education program. Your program can help prevent the risk of early childhood dental caries by serving well-balanced nutritious food and by limiting sugary and sticky foods. Dental care providers, health coordinators, and nurse consultants can also assist by providing oral health education and prevention for parents and CYS staff.

#### **Promotion of Daily Toothbrushing**

- Half-day programs are expected to have children brush their teeth at least once per day either *after* breakfast or lunch.
- Full-day programs are expected to have children brush their teeth at least twice per day *after* breakfast and lunch.
- Daily toothbrushing should be reflected in the daily classroom schedule and coincide with the meal service times.

Depending on your facilities, the scheduling of toothbrushing should be a well planned and positive experience. Caregivers should also supervise children during toothbrushing to ensure proper toothbrushing is achieved.

It is recommended that only small groups of children (i.e., no more than two or three) brush their teeth at the same time. Waiting can be avoided by offering a transition activity, such as reading or story circle.



## **Adults as Role Models**

Since children imitate the actions of the adults around them, it is important for volunteers and teachers to act as role models and set an example for children by brushing their teeth with them when possible.

## **Cleaning Procedures for Infants**

After feeding an infant, (a) wipe their teeth and gums with a clean moist cloth to remove any remaining liquid, which can lead to tooth decay. (b) Wash the cloth after use (all cloths should be washed daily). (c) Staff/volunteers should wash their hands before and after cleaning the infant's teeth and gums.

## **Cleaning Procedures for Toddlers**

Toddlers may require help and encouragement with cleaning their teeth. This can be done by standing or leaning over the child to be sure all teeth are cleaned properly.

## **Toothbrushes**

- Select toothbrushes that are designed for young children.
- Toothbrushes should have soft bristles, a small brush head and a handle that is easy to grip.
- Each child should have his or her own toothbrush clearly labeled with their name.
- Do not allow children to share or borrow toothbrushes.
- Replace toothbrushes every three to four months, when the toothbrush is damaged or worn, if the bristles are damaged or split, if a child has chewed on the toothbrush or when a child has been ill with a contagious disease.

## **Toothpaste**

- Choose fluoride toothpaste that has the American Dental Association Seal of Acceptance on the carton or toothpaste tube.
- Check the toothpaste tube to be sure that it has not expired.
- The caregiver should use about ¼ to ½ the size of a pea of fluoride toothpaste for children under three years of age and a pea-sized amount for children over three years age.

## **Toothbrush storage**

- Each child's toothbrush should be kept separate in the storage container.
- Air must be able to circulate to prevent the growth of mold and bacteria.
- Toothbrush covers are not necessary, but if used, the air holes must be large enough for air to circulate.
- Toothbrushes should *never* touch or drip on each other.
- Store toothbrushes in a place where the bristles will not touch anything else to prevent crushing or contamination.
- Keep children's toothbrushes covered at night.

### **Prevention of Tooth Decay and Early Childhood Caries**

- Establishing the dental home will help prevent tooth decay and dental caries by providing comprehensive, continuously accessible and affordable care by a licensed and trained oral health care provider.
- Regular dental visits will ensure early detection of oral/dental problems to protect and preserve children's teeth.
- Parents are important advocates for their child's oral health care. Assist parents to ensure that dental appointments are kept, treatment plans are developed and explained, and that necessary treatment is completed by the end of the program year.
- Oral health displays such as posters, simple dental messages, photos of children receiving dental health checkups, dental equipment and photographs of healthy foods or charts of the mouth for educational purposes helps to promote good oral health hygiene in child care.

Remember, cleaning teeth and gums is the most important way to prevent dental and gum disease for Head Start/Child Care children.

If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact your assigned Support Services Coordinator at 312-743-0300.

Thank you for your continued support.

cc: Mary Ellen Caron  
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