



City of Chicago  
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Chicago Department of  
Children and Youth Services

Mary Ellen Caron  
Commissioner

Executive Office  
2nd Floor  
1615 West Chicago Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois 60622  
(312) 743-0300  
(312) 743-0400 (FAX)  
(312) 746-5445 (TTY)  
<http://www.cityofchicago.org>

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

From: Madeline Hanieh, Director *MH*  
Program Support and Development  
Children Services Division

Date: January 20, 2009

Subject: **Program Daily Toothbrushing Policy, 0-5**

This memorandum serves to reinforce and support the Department of Family Support Services, Office of Children and Youth Services Daily Toothbrushing Program Policy in all Early/Head Start/Child Care classrooms and homes. A daily toothbrushing program will ensure that children establish a daily routine for good oral health and hygiene.

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. The Surgeon's General Report on Oral Health in America has called oral health disease a "hidden epidemic" (US DHHS, 2000). A health objective of the Healthy People 2010 Program, a national public health agenda, has focused on increased access to dental care and a reduction of dental decay and untreated caries.

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 help by providing oral health education and prevention for parents and staff.

**Promotion of Daily Toothbrushing/Flossing (2-5 years old)**

Half-day programs are expected to brush at least once per day either *after* breakfast or *after* lunch. Full-day programs are expected to brush at least twice per day *after* breakfast and *after* lunch. Daily tooth brushing/flossing should be reflected in the daily classroom schedule and coincide with the meal service times. Once a day flossing needs to be initiated when the back molars begin to move closer to together. This is generally between the ages of 2 ½ - 3 years old. Depending on your facilities, the scheduling of toothbrushing should be a well planned and positive experience. Caregivers should supervise toothbrushing to ensure proper toothbrushing activity.

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

**Adults are Role Models**

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

**Cleaning Procedures – Infants and Toddlers**

After feeding an infant, wipe their gums and teeth with a *one-time use gauze pad*. This is to remove remaining liquid that is on the teeth and gums, which can lead to tooth decay. Staff or volunteers should wash their hands before and after cleaning the infant's teeth and gums.



For children under 2 years old, a fluoride rinse or a smear of fluoride toothpaste should be used two times per day as recommended by the AAPD. 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 worn out 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.

### **Floss**

*Use disposable Floss Aids that are designed for young children.*

### **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. When you are not in your usual location, it is best to swish the mouth. For infants and toddlers, a smear of toothpaste on a one-time use gauze pad should be used.

### **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. Individual toothbrush covers are not permitted since they may harbor bacteria. 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 cross-contamination. Keep children's toothbrushes covered *with a net* at night. The child should wet the brush in the cup, take a rinsing drink, and then spit into sink.

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

- Establishing the dental home will help prevent tooth decay and dental caries by providing a 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 early 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/Early Head Start/Child Care children.

Thank you for your continued support.

If you have questions, please contact your assigned Support Services Coordinator at 312-743-0300.

CYS/MCH/pm

cc: Mary Ellen Caron  
Vanessa Rich  
Loukisha Smart-Pennix  
Paulette Mercurius  
Luis Rios  
Janet Williamson  
Beatrice Nichols