



# Brush Up on Oral Health

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## Understanding the Role of Dental Hygienist Liaisons

Dental hygienists play an important role in promoting oral health and preventing oral disease. Because of this role, the National Center on Health, Behavioral Health, and Safety (NCHBHS), working in partnership with the American Dental Hygienists' Association, created the Dental Hygienist Liaison (DHL) program. Under the DHL program, one dental hygienist from each state volunteers to help promote oral health for pregnant people and children enrolled in Head Start.



This Brush Up on Oral Health tip sheet describes the role of DHLs and how they can help staff promote oral health and prevent oral disease in Head Start programs.

## Role of the Dental Hygienist Liaison

DHLs provide a communication link between NCHBHS and Head Start programs in their states. DHLs work with state and local organizations to solve problems related to access to oral health care for pregnant people and children. They also share information and resources about promoting oral health and preventing oral disease with program staff and families.

Every state has a DHL to promote good oral health among Head Start participants. To contact the DHL in your state, send a message to [health@ecetta.info](mailto:health@ecetta.info).

## Dental Hygienist Liaisons and the Promotion of Oral Health

DHLs can help promote oral health in the following ways:

- Collaborate with state organizations and offices such as oral health programs and Head Start State Collaboration Offices (HSSCOs). For example, DHLs can work with HSSCOs to identify oral health needs and activities for local Head Start programs.
- Share information about the importance of oral health and regular oral health visits, good nutrition and oral hygiene practices, and oral-injury-prevention strategies with program staff.

- Help Head Start staff identify and establish dental homes for pregnant people and children, encourage pregnant people to get all needed oral health care, and encourage parents to get all needed oral health care for their child and themselves.
  - Provide or work with a local oral health professional to deliver training for center-based and home visiting staff on establishing partnerships to improve oral health for pregnant people and children and engaging parents to promote oral health. Training may also focus on preventive practices. For example, topics could be brushing with fluoride toothpaste, drinking fluoridated tap water, and receiving fluoride varnish applications.
  - Oral health education sessions for families.
  - Fluoride varnish applications for children.
- Serve on Head Start health services advisory committees or oral health advisory boards and coalitions.
- Meet with state and local oral health professionals to share information about the Head Start program's commitment to oral health and about assistance available to help program participants get oral health care.
- Share resources (e.g., educational materials, contact information for oral health professionals) with Head Start program staff and families.



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