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Reducing Childhood Dental Caries Through Dental Homes

Introduction

- The kindergarten dental checkup requirement, AB 1433, signed into law in 2006, helps schools identify children suffering from untreated dental disease and helps parents establish a dental home for their children. The aim was to prepare the child for school by California law requiring children to have a dental checkup by May 31 of their first school year. Dental evaluations that have happened within the 12 months before the child enters school also meet the requirement.
- Our proposal is to extend this law into every year of school through 12th grade.
- This law will encourage the importance of oral health and continued oral health treatment for children throughout their adolescence.

Issue

- Oral health is key to the overall health and development of a child.
- Tooth decay is the most common chronic childhood disease, experienced by more than two-thirds of California's children and five times more common than asthma. California's schoolchildren, ages 6 to 8, experience oral disease at twice the rate of schoolchildren in other states (4).
- Not only is tooth decay preventable, it is an infectious disease that contributes to lost school hours, negatively impacts eating, education and self confidence.
- Dental caries is the most common chronic disease among youth aged 6–19 years. Monitoring prevalence of untreated and total caries is key to preventing and controlling oral diseases (4).
- Prevalence of caries was lowest in children 2-5 years old compared with those aged 6-11 and 12-19 years old (4). This law would increase a child's access to dental care, promote regulatory dental screenings thereby decrease caries risk in children.

Importance and Impact

- Students with tooth related pain are 4 times more likely to have a low grade point average. For every 100 elementary and high school-aged children, 58 and 80 school hours, respectively, are missed annually and their parents averaged 2.5 absent days from work due to their child's dental problems (6).
- Increasing child caries experience was associated with worsening child and family quality of life (3).

- Children with poor oral health status were nearly 3 times more likely than were their counterparts to miss school as a result of dental pain. Absences caused by pain were associated with poorer school performance, but absences for routine care were not.
- These findings suggest that improving children's oral health status may be a vehicle to enhancing their educational experience (6).
- Texas A&M University School of Public Health stated emergency room visits due to preventable dental conditions cost taxpayers, hospitals, and the government about \$2 billion a year.
- Funds from the Budget Act of 2006 can be used to offset reimbursement to local educational agencies (2).

Recommendation

We propose a new bill that would require all public schools, after receiving completed assessments, and by December 31 of each year from kindergarten to 12th grade, to send a report, to the local health officer of the county office of education. This report will help children maintain a dental home, increase access to dental care, decrease childhood caries, and reduce the physiologic and monetary burden of dental caries.

References

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