

# Children's Oral Health Program

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## What is an FQHC?

FQHC is the acronym for federally qualified health center, commonly referred to as the "safety net." FQHCs are the major providers of comprehensive culturally competent, community-based primary health care in New Jersey, serving the most vulnerable residents. There are 20 main community health centers and 103 satellite sites located across the state. Funding for FQHCs is provided by Sections 330/329 of the United States Public Health Service. Most counties in NJ have an FQHC. Although somewhat different in composition and nature of services provided, the FQHCs target the health care needs of the medically underserved within their respective service regions. Most FQHCs are located in high density, urban areas or rural areas with diverse populations.

Over one million patient visits are made annually to New Jersey's FQHCs. Most FQHCs provide comprehensive services and while different in scope, typically include internal medicine, obstetrics, gynecology, pediatrics, geriatrics, laboratory, podiatry, pharmacy, mental health and dental services. Seventy-two (72%) percent of the state's FQHCs provide preventive dental services. Some sites offer mobile and other ancillary services, such as outreach, transportation and translation.

To get more information on FQHCs in your area, please visit the New Jersey Primary Care Association website at <http://www.njpca.org>. The New Jersey Dental Clinic Directory also contains a listing of FQHCs with dental services: [www.dentalclinics.nj.gov](http://www.dentalclinics.nj.gov)

# Miles of Smiles

New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services  
 Children's Oral Health Program

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## Causes and Treatment for Dry Mouth

Many people take the saliva in our mouths for granted. However, saliva plays an important role in overall health in several important ways such as aiding in eating and digestion, enhancing our ability to taste and swallow food. Saliva protects teeth from decay by washing away food particles from teeth and gums and helps to neutralize the mouth's pH



after meals and snacks.

As a result, a lack of saliva, commonly referred to as "dry mouth," is a serious health concern. Dry mouth is known as xerostomia (pronounced zeer-o-STO-me-uh) and its symptoms include bad breath, sore tongue, difficulty swallowing and even fungal infections. Not only can eating become difficult, but rampant tooth decay can result unless proper preventive care is taken.

Xerostomia has several common causes including the use of certain medications, tobacco use, cancer therapy including chemotherapy and radiation, nerve damage to the head or neck area and methamphetamine abuse.

It is important to see a doctor when xerostomia occurs both to determine the

cause and develop a treatment plan. Doctors can prescribe medications to stimulate saliva production or recommend over the counter saliva substitutes. For severe cases of dry

### Over 400 medications can cause xerostomia including:

- anti-depressants and anti-anxiety
- antihistamines
- decongestants
- high blood pressure medications
- anti-diarrheals
- muscle relaxants
- drugs for urinary incontinence
- Parkinson's disease medications

mouth, a dentist may recommend daily fluoride treatment in addition to more frequent tooth brushing.

Many of the following tips are also helpful in managing symptoms and protecting teeth from decay:

- Sipping water frequently
- Chewing sugar-free gum
- Brushing teeth after each meal with fluoride toothpaste and limiting sugary/acidic foods and drinks
- Using alcohol-free mouthwash
- Avoiding alcohol, caffeine, and tobacco
- Using a humidifier at night
- Breathing through the nose rather than the mouth
- Avoiding use of over-the-counter antihistamines and decongestants.

## A Dangerous Connection: Infections and Oral Health

### Risky Business: HPV and Oral Health



The mouth has been identified in the Surgeon General's Report on Oral Health as the mirror of the

body. A dangerous connection has been identified between HPV and oral health.

HPV is widespread and 120 strains of the virus have been isolated from humans. HPV is the cause of most cervical cancers in women and has recently been linked to an increase in oral cancer rates among a younger population.

It was once believed that the use of tobacco and alcohol were the primary causative factors in the development of oral cancer. Now there appears to be a third factor: infection with the HPV. It is also probable that changes in sexual behaviors may be contributing to the increased spread of HPV and oral cancer. In a study conducted by Johns Hopkins Oncology Center, it was discovered that 25% of patients with oral cancer tested positive for HPV infection.



Most oral cancers are asymptomatic and are diagnosed in

advanced stages. When discovered early, there is an 80-90% survival rate. Protect student health through addressing this issue proactively. Encourage your students to have regular dental checkups including an oral cancer screening. Remember, early detection is key to saving lives!

## More Reasons to Avoid Swapping Spit



Sharing food or drinks is a common way that colds and viruses are spread. Through saliva sharing behaviors, children can contract mononucleosis, herpes infections, warts, hepatitis B and meningococcal disease. However, many health professionals don't know that in addition to colds and viruses, the spread of tooth decay-causing bacteria is also a significant concern, especially for young children.

Sharing utensils and cups, kissing, cleaning baby's pacifier with the mouth, and cleaning babies' and children's mouths with saliva can transmit Streptococcus Mutans



(SM) and Lactobacillus, two of the key bacteria implicated in tooth decay. Educating children and parents about the following healthy practices can help reduce the spread of colds, viruses, and tooth decay:

- Use separate toothbrushes for each family member
- Take care during food preparation, washing hands and utensils as needed
- Use an extra cup when sharing drinks
- Provide separate serving utensils and plates when sharing food
- Avoid cleaning dropped pacifiers with the mouth and sharing utensils when feeding young children.



## Let the Biter Beware!



Benzocaine is a commonly used over the counter local anesthetic to alleviate gum and mouth discomfort for teething, canker sores, and other oral irritations. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has recently issued a warning concerning the use of products containing benzocaine, especially in children under the age of two. Though rare, there have been reports of methemoglobinemia, a serious and sometimes fatal condition affecting the oxygen carrying ability of the blood. Signs of this disorder include

pale or bluish coloring of the skin, lips, and nail beds, shortness of breath, lethargy, confusion, headache, and rapid heart rate. Ignoring these symptoms could result in permanent brain injury, and even death.

The FDA strongly recommends that parents and consumers should not use these OTC products on children under the age of 2, unless it is under the direction of a health care professional. The FDA also cautions to use only as directed. OTC products with benzocaine should be kept out of the reach of children.

What do you do if a child is suffering from mouth pain? The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the use of a refrigerator chilled teething ring or a gentle massag-



ing of the child's gums with a finger.

For a list of products containing benzocaine and further information, please see the website: <http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/DrugSafety/ucm250029.htm>.



## Announcement!

We are pleased to announce that the Children's Oral Health Program can now be accessed on the NJ Department of Health and Senior Services website at:

[www.nj.gov/health/fhs/oral/index.shtml](http://www.nj.gov/health/fhs/oral/index.shtml)

This site contains valuable information for school nurses, health professionals and consumers. The NJ Dental Clinic Directory, oral health curriculums and other resources such as "Oral Health News You Can Use" are available on this site. Please visit the site soon!