



Preventing early childhood
caries through medical and
dental provider education
and collaboration

Early childhood caries (ECC) is a significant public health concern and tooth decay is the most common chronic disease of childhood, affecting five times more children than asthma. According to the 2007 Oregon Smile Survey, 59.3% of 1st graders in Oregon have or had a cavity¹. In spite of its high prevalence, tooth decay is a preventable disease. In response, the Oregon Oral Health Program in collaboration with the Oregon Oral Health Coalition's (OROHC) Early Childhood Cavities Prevention Committee (ECCP) has launched a three-year workforce development project called "First Tooth". The goal of the project is to reduce early childhood caries in Oregon by training medical and dental providers to implement preventive oral health services for infants and toddlers ages three and under.

"First Tooth" offers a no-cost training for dental and medical communities to assess the oral health of infants and toddlers. Both the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommend an oral health risk assessment, including a visual screening, anticipatory guidance, preventive strategies and the establishment of a dental home by age 1. "First Tooth" training topics include the prevalence and impact of oral disease, risk assessment, culturally appropriate anticipatory guidance, fluoride varnish application, implementation, workflow tips and access to dental care. Research studies show that application of fluoride varnish can reduce tooth decay by about 33% in primary teeth². "First Tooth" also provides on-site support and helps to foster collaboration between dental and medical providers to expand access to early childhood caries preventions services in their communities.

The "First Tooth" training includes:

- In-office continuing education over lunch, in-service trainings or evenings, approximately 1 - 2 hours depending on needs
- Training for *all* providers and staff on how oral health preventive services can easily be integrated into their current services
- Hands-on practice of fluoride varnish application
- Culturally appropriate handouts, exam/waiting room posters and anticipatory guidance that can be shared with parents and caregivers
- Guidelines to help the medical provider refer children to a dental home by age one
- Continued support and technical assistance with project staff on systems-based implementation, workflow and clinical instruction

"First Tooth" is a two phase project. In Phase I the curriculum, training tools, delivery and technical assistance were piloted and tested. Currently in year two and Phase II, the project is expanding outreach and training statewide. A comprehensive, web-based oral health resource and training site is in development with a launch date goal of August 2011.

We wish to thank past and present members of the OROHC ECCP committee and "First Tooth" advisory board for their time and expertise. We also appreciate the helpful assistance of our colleagues in other states where similar programs are already in place.

¹ Oregon Smile Survey (2007) Oregon Department of Human Services

² Marinho VCC, Higgins JPT, Logan S, Sheiham A. Fluoride varnishes for preventing dental caries in children and adolescents. *The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2002, Issue 1

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