

# WATCH YOUR MOUTH

## Proven Solutions for Growing a Healthy Massachusetts

Massachusetts leads the nation in innovative approaches to health care. We have some of the best hospitals and research facilities in the world, and recently we boldly transformed our health care system to help provide health coverage to all of our residents. We need to apply this same innovative thinking to an essential part of the health care system that is often left out of the conversation: oral health.

Oral health is a critical component of overall health. Dental decay is the single most common, chronic disease of childhood—more common than asthma or obesity. A recent report found that 40% of Massachusetts' children have a history of decay by the time they have reached third grade. This is a number equivalent to 10 children in every third grade classroom in the state. Left untreated, dental disease can impact a child's most basic activities such as eating, sleeping and paying attention in school. And in adulthood, dental disease is associated with chronic health conditions such as heart diseases and diabetes. Fortunately, we know how to prevent this disease and we have community-based solutions right here in the Commonwealth that are proven to work.

Today's system of oral health care does not reach all children in our state, resulting in lost opportunities to prevent missed school time, pain, and loss of sleep. Currently, our state's system of oral health care is a patchwork of services, where entire communities are unable to access highly effective preventive services because they simply do not have the systems in place to provide them. The solution to this problem is right under our noses—our existing community resources such as schools and physicians' offices provide an opportunity to reach children where they are and increase access to care in communities that need it.

Children see their pediatrician many times in the first years of their life. If we were to roll dental screenings into regular well-child visits, we could create a system of early detection of disease, sharing of important information, and referral for dental care for all children in our state.

Schools are another great way to reach children with oral health care. School-based services or programs can provide dental screenings and access to important preventive measures such as dental sealants and fluoride rinses or varnishes. When combined, these two simple interventions (sealants and fluoride) can prevent up to 90% of childhood tooth decay.

What will it take to make that happen? It is clear from Massachusetts' rich history that we can tackle health care issues when we work together. We have proven solutions to the widespread problem of childhood dental disease; we just need the will to implement them. So, let's Watch Our Mouths and use them to speak up for children's oral health. Together, we can prevent dental disease and continue to grow a new generation of healthy Massachusetts' children.

**[www.WatchYourMouth.org](http://www.WatchYourMouth.org)**

or call 1-866-WYMouth (1-866-996-6884)