

Bexar County's 2007 Head Start Oral Health Program

During the 2007 school year, the San Antonio Metropolitan Health District dentists provided more than 6,700 on-site visual dental examinations for Head Start enrollees in Bexar County. Children from households with a family income at or below 133% of poverty are eligible for Head Start. The following table presents the data collected and compiled from the examination process from 2001 through 2007 for enrollees between the ages of three to five. The data collected during the 2007 school year indicates that 24% of the children exhibited visible signs of untreated dental disease at the time of the examination. In addition, caries experience was observed in 40% of the children. That is, signs were present of both treated and/or untreated decay during the examination. The Healthy People 2010 goals for children from two to four years of age are 11% for caries experience and 9% for untreated decay in the primary dentition. Clearly, the oral health status of this patient sample falls significantly short of national objectives.

Dental caries, commonly known as tooth decay, is the most common chronic infectious disease of children ages 5-17 years old. It is a preventable disease that can lead to persistent pain, infection, compromised nutritional intake, difficulty sleeping and reduced self-esteem. The CDC estimates that more than 51 million school hours are lost each year due to dental-related illness. Children and adolescents living in poverty are disproportionately affected by dental disease. It is a widely known fact that 80% of tooth decay is found in only 20% of children. Fluoridated community water systems and school-based sealant programs are proven strategies to eliminate oral health disparities. Nationwide, access to adequate oral health services is the most frequently cited unmet need by families with children enrolled in Head Start.

Year	TOTAL Screenings	Visible Signs of Decay	% of Total	No Visible Sign of Decay	% of Total	Caries Experience	% of Total
2007	6,703	1,600	24%	5,103	76%	2,700	40%
2006	6,734	1,414	21%	5,320	79%	2,848	42%
2005*	12,301	1,908	16%	10,393	84%	4,670	38%
2004*	11,472	2,075	18%	9,397	82%	4,240	37%
2003*	11,142	2,258	20%	8,884	80%	4,301	39%
2002*	10,545	2,834	27%	7,711	73%	4,626	44%
2001*	6,268	1,969	31%	4,299	69%	3,050	49%
Totals	58,462	12,458	21%	46,004	79%	23,735	41%

* Indicates two screenings were performed for each enrollee during the designated school year