

PRESS RELEASE
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NH DHHS Awarded \$1.85 Million CDC Grant for Initiatives to Improve Dental Health of Granite State Residents

Concord, NH – The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has announced a five-year, \$1.85 million grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that will help the Granite State improve and sustain oral health. The funding will go toward promoting oral health in three targeted areas: assisting school children who face barriers to dental treatment; ensuring fluoride optimization in community water systems; and improving surveillance and reporting of the State’s oral health system.

“This grant allows us to celebrate October, National Dental Hygiene Awareness Month, in a very meaningful way,” said Hope Saltmarsh, DHHS Oral Health Program Director. “We are putting these funds to work to target New Hampshire initiatives of decreasing tooth decay and closing gaps in demographic and geographic differences in oral health.”

Tooth decay is the most common chronic childhood disease. The first area addressed with the funds is the NH Oral Health Program’s school-based dental programs to promote good oral health care among New Hampshire’s youth. Through school-based dental programs from 2001 to 2014, the percentage of third graders in NH with sealants increased 15% and those with untreated dental decay decreased 14%. Even with these improvements, children in some areas of the state continue to experience higher rates of untreated decay than their peers. The new CDC grant will facilitate a follow up survey of third graders’ oral health and provide services to more students in elementary and middle school-based programs that have a higher percentage of untreated decay.

Secondly, the Oral Health Program will work in coordination with fluoridated community water systems to ensure fluoride optimization. This will be done through monitoring of water quality, promoting training, and incentivizing optimization. Community assessments will be conducted to allow the Oral Health Program to better understand community perceptions about fluoridation, and to better communicate the health benefits that have been experienced in key communities throughout the state, including Concord, Durham, Laconia, Lancaster and Manchester.

The final grant outcome will be improvements to the State’s monitoring and reporting systems. Oral diseases, risk factors and access to preventive services information will be used in conjunction with data gathered from the [New Hampshire Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System](#), a joint CDC–DHHS project. According to the data, a third of women enrolled in Medicaid reported needing to see a dentist for a problem during pregnancy, but only about half actually visited a dentist due to their inability to afford care. Poor oral health is associated with increased risk for diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and adverse pregnancy outcomes. The funding will ensure robust reporting and observation of data gathered from the NH Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System.

More information about oral health programs in New Hampshire, including [National Dental Hygiene Awareness Month](#), can be found on the DHHS website. For more information regarding the grantor of this competitive grant, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov.

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