COLORADO
Department of Public Health & Environment

Dear Valued School Partners,

The recently passed Senate Bill 24-142 directs the creation of a pilot school-based oral health screening program to address the significant rise in tooth decay among children. The Oral Health Unit (OHU) at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) is working with the Colorado Department of Education to bring this program to schools to help protect children from unnecessary pain, missed school days, and a lifetime of educational, health, and social consequences resulting from poor oral health.

An oral health screening is a visual and manual inspection of the mouth that is conducted by a trained clinician to identify oral disease or other oral conditions that may require care by oral health professionals. Recent oral health screening data collected by the OHU indicate that in Colorado, **nearly half of kindergartners have tooth decay**, and **among third graders that number increases to 60%**. These alarming statistics don't just threaten children's health—they also undermine their educational success. Untreated oral disease can significantly impair attention and amplify behavioral problems, creating a barrier to learning and overall educational achievement. School-based oral health screening is an effective strategy to identify children in need of dental care, potentially preventing future adverse health outcomes that can impact school performance.

The OHU seeks to identify schools that would like to participate in this new pilot program to provide oral health screenings during the 2025-2026 school year. If your school does not have an established oral health screening program, and you are interested in partnering with the OHU to bring screening to your Kindergarten and 3rd-grade students, please complete this online interest form. This program is offered at no cost to your school, and funds are available to support your school's participation. If you have any questions, please email Ashleigh Kirk at ashleigh.kirk@state.co.us.

Please see below for further information on school and OHU program responsibilities.

Responsibilities of Participating Schools:

- Coordinate with the OHU to establish a screening process that includes administrative approval for your school's participation.
- Collaborate with the OHU to identify a qualified clinician ("screener"), approved by OHU, to perform oral health screenings.
- Sign the OHU Oral Health Data Sharing Agreement. This agreement is between the school, the screener, and OHU.
- Coordinate with the screener to determine screening logistics (*i.e.*, provide space within the school for the screening, provide at minimum a table and two chairs, and organize students for participation on the selected date).
- Distribute the OHU-provided parent/guardian consent forms and collect forms from students who have opted out of the screening.

- Provide the screener with student rosters with birth month and year, race, ethnicity, and gender. Also include information about students who have special needs that should be considered during screening, such as being deaf, blind, or having a hypersensitivity that may impact completion of the screening.
- Provide OHU with the total class enrollment, if any students were absent on the day of screening, and the number of students who opted out, with any reasons that were provided.
- Provide staff or volunteer support for the screener on the day of screening to escort the students to and from the classroom and to perform clerical/recording duties, if possible.
- Coordinate with the screener to send the results of the screening back to the parent/caregiver.
- Participate in post-screening evaluation activities with OHU.

Responsibilities of the Oral Health Unit:

- Coordinate with the school to establish a screening process.
- Identify a trained clinician to conduct oral health screenings, and facilitate connections between the screener and the school.
- Provide funding to the school to support the administrative tasks associated with the full screening process.
- Provide communication resources and necessary forms (*i.e.*, parent/caregiver outreach letter, screening consent forms, and parent/caregiver follow-up letter post-screening).
- Provide the necessary screening supplies and funding for the screeners to conduct oral health screenings.
- Provide on-going technical assistance to the school and screener throughout the screening process.
- Collect, gather, analyze, and summarize oral health screening data.
- Provide reports on oral health screening findings to participating schools.
- Provide oral health education materials to participating schools for future use in classroom education.

We look forward to working with Colorado schools to implement this critical new pilot program. If your school does not have an established oral health screening program, and you are interested in partnering with the OHU to bring screening to your Kindergarten and 3rd-grade students, please complete this online interest form. If you have any questions, please email Ashleigh Kirk at ashleigh.kirk@state.co.us.

Wishing you all a great start to the new school year!
Sincerely,

Ashleigh Kirk

Ashleigh Kirk, MSW
Oral Health Unit Program Manager
Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

