



NEWS RELEASE

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Oral Health Supporters to Discuss Progress and Welcome the “Watch Your Mouth” Van to Utah

(Salt Lake City, UT) - One year after U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher released the first national “Oral Health In America” report, Utah is part of a growing band of states that is working to expand dental care access for children. On this first anniversary of the Surgeon General’s report, it is clear that Utah is working to provide kids improved access to oral health services.

“The Surgeon General’s report stated that oral diseases are progressive and cumulative and become more complex over time. They can affect our ability to eat, how we look and the way we communicate. These diseases can affect economic productivity and compromise our ability to work,” said Dr. Steven Steed, State Dental Director for the Utah Department of Health (UDOH). “Health disparities exist across population groups at all ages. There are striking disparities in dental disease by income. Poor children suffer twice as much dental caries as their more affluent peers, and their disease is more likely to be untreated.”

Today, the UDOH, Utah Children’s KIDS COUNT, children’s advocates and civic leaders are highlighting improvements in oral health care for Utah’s children.

“The most common chronic childhood disease in America is tooth decay,” explains Terry Haven, KIDS COUNT coordinator for Utah Children. “Nationally, decay is five times more common than childhood asthma which affects half of all first graders and nearly 80 percent of seventeen-year-olds. Some of these children have trouble eating and sleeping, paying attention to parents and concentrating in school. But this is a problem we can solve. When communities make prevention and early treatment a priority, kids can get regular check-ups, sealants and fluoride,” she adds.

In Utah, government and business are working together to improve oral health care for children:

- Most recently, the UDOH’s Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) expanded coverage for dental care. As of July 1, 2001, CHIP has increased its dental benefit to include stainless steel crowns and surgical extractions. This enhancement in coverage will help immensely in meeting the dental

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needs of this population. Other CHIP dental services may include cleaning, exams, x-rays, fluoride, sealants, fillings, space maintainers, pulpotomies, and extractions. Currently, CHIP covers nearly 24,000 children in Utah and enrollment is growing.

- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Utah’s Caring Foundation for Children has just launched its new dental program, which is now providing free oral health care for children who have medical insurance but who are without dental insurance. This program hopes to serve 250 children in its first year with plans to expand in following years.

In October 2000, the first Utah Oral Health Summit was held by the UDOH. More than one hundred stakeholders and advocates came together with the goal of developing short-term strategies and a long-term work plans to improve oral health among Utah residents. As a result of the Summit, three workgroups were organized in the areas of access, policy and funding, and prevention and education.

Last month a follow-up to the Summit was held where the work groups began moving toward action plans. At this meeting the UDOH shared preliminary data from the UDOH’s, first of its kind, State-wide Oral Health Survey of children 6-8 years of age. More than 1,500 children were screened in 37 schools statewide. The preliminary survey data determined:

- Fifty-eight percent of Utah children ages 6-8 have experienced dental decay
- Twenty-two percent of Utah children ages 6-8 have untreated dental decay
- Fifty percent of eight-year-old Utah children have dental sealants
- 21 percent of the survey participants were not covered by dental insurance

(Final and additional survey data will be released this fall to assist communities in developing interventions to address oral health issues.)

Utah Children today is hosting the “Watch Your Mouth” van, a 40 foot brightly illustrated mobile unit, which is on a national tour, en route to Santa Clara, CA, where it will become the focal point for California’s new oral health initiative. This “modern dental office on wheels” will serve children in need across greater Santa Clara County with oral health education, risk assessment, prevention, preservative services, emergency relief, and referral for complex restorative cases. “Watch Your Mouth” is the slogan of a campaign shared with Washington State to make children’s oral health a public priority. Health Trust, a nonprofit public charity dedicated to serving the people of Santa Clara County by expanding access to health care and promoting health education and wellness, funds the van. “Watch Your Mouth” is a national campaign designed by the nonprofit FrameWorks Institute in Washington, DC, in response to the Surgeon General’s oral health report.