



CDPH

California Department of
Public Health

ORAL HEALTH BYTES

A Newsletter For Local Oral Health Programs

February marks Children's Dental Health Month, which is dedicated to raising awareness about the significance of oral health for children. In this edition, we highlight this important observance and explore innovative ways to provide dental care, including the growing field of teledentistry.

Children's Dental Health Month



Calendar

February 2025 – Children’s Dental Health Month
March 2025 – [National Nutrition Month](#)
March 1, 2025 – Quarter 2 Invoices due to OOH

March 6, 2025 – Project Directors’ Meeting
March 20, 2025 – [World Oral Health Day](#)



Start 2025 with Healthy Smiles and Medi-Cal Dental Resources

Start the new year by helping Medi-Cal families take care of their oral health. The updated [“Medi-Cal Has Dental Covered”](#) flyer from Smile, California is designed to make dental benefits simple to understand. The flyer outlines covered services for all ages and includes a QR code for quick access to the [Find a Dentist tool on SmileCalifornia.org](#), making it easier for families to get the care they need.

LOHPs can co-brand the flyer with their organization’s logo for FREE by [submitting a request here](#). Download the flyer in English and Spanish here.

[Flyer Here](#)

Guide Families to Find Their Dental Home

Encourage Medi-Cal members to schedule regular check-ups and start 2025 with strong oral health habits! The [Find a Dentist tool](#) makes it easy for members to locate a provider. Share these videos on your social media or website to show your community how simple it is to use:

How to Use the Find a Dentist Tool Video:

Full Version:

- [Watch in English](#)
- [Watch in Spanish](#)

To stay updated on the Smile, California campaign, [sign up for Smile Alerts](#).



School Dental Program Corner

Policy and Procedure Update: TK and KOHA (AB 2630)

[AB 2630](#), which passed in September 2024, took effect on January 1, 2025. This new legislation clarifies the existing Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment (KOHA) requirement ([EC 49452.8](#)) will now apply to children enrolled in Transitional Kindergarten (TK). As a result, TK students will be included in KOHA, to ensure earlier oral health screening and intervention.

For schools and Local Oral Health Programs (LOHPs), this change means that efforts to promote KOHA and school dental programs should now include TK students in their outreach and services.

As EC 49452.8 now includes TK in the definition of "kindergarten", the California Department of Education (CDE) recommends that TK students be treated the same as kindergartners. EC 49452.8 also provides that proof shall be required only once during a two-year kindergarten program.

For reporting purposes under this section, TK students will be counted with the kindergartners and will not be reported as a separate age group in the System for California Oral Health Reporting ([SCOHR](#)). When filling out the KOHA form, enter TK, K or 1st Grade.

The law states that students need to be screened once between TK and K grades, or first grade if that is their first year of public school. However, it is recommended that children receive regular dental care to improve school success, reduce chronic absences and improve their overall health.

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We launched this section last January to provide updates and resources that support the advancement of LOHP goals for school dental programs. This space will also feature updates from the School Dental Program Workgroup. With that in mind, here is the first SCOHR Corner Spotlight.

LOHP SCOHR Corner: Highlighting LOHP's efforts with SCOHR

We are thrilled to introduce our first "SCOHR Corner" spotlight: Claire Bleymaier! Claire is the Program Director for the San Mateo Local Oral Health Program and has a nursing background. She combines her expertise in program planning with her warm smile to lead the Resources Subcommittee of the School Dental Program Workgroup. She actively participates in the Data Subcommittee. Over the past few years, Claire has mentored numerous LOHPs to enhance their data collection efforts. She has also presented at the Office of Oral Health's Project Directors' Meeting, sharing successful strategies for communicating with schools and promoting whole-school adoption of KOHA in San Mateo County.



Under Claire's leadership, several valuable KOHA tools have been created for LOHPs, including the Data Input form (Excel/PDF), an auto-calculation Excel spreadsheet, and a tutorial video to assist with data collection. Depending on how your local oral health program gathers data from KOHA screenings, we encourage you to explore these resources to simplify the process of entering your KOHA data into SCOHR and to use visuals and tables to highlight trends in your data. To learn more, visit the new [KOHA webpage!](#)

California Oral Health Technical Assistance Center (COHTAC)

Promoting National Children's Dental Health Month (NCDHM)

Every February, we have the opportunity to highlight the importance of children's oral health and the essential work LOHPs do year-round to improve the oral health of California's children. This annual event provides a window of opportunity to raise awareness in your communities, celebrate oral health champions, and strengthen partnerships through collaboration on National Children's Dental Health Month (NCDHM) promotions. COHTAC has compiled a list of resources below to assist you with your efforts.

National Children's Dental Health Month



Welcome to COHTAC's National Children's Dental Health Month Social Media Toolkit!

The COHTAC website features a [social media toolkit](#) with ready-made graphics, sample social media posts, and campaign tips to help you and your partners promote NCDHM. You can also view a [webinar for LOHPs with accompanying resources](#) containing in-depth insights and expert advice on creating effective, community-focused NCDHM campaigns (both social media and traditional media).

You can find these resources and others at the links below: [COHTAC National Children's Dental Health Month social media toolkit](#)

- [COHTAC Share & Learn: Planning for National Children's Dental Health Month](#)
- [COHTAC National Children's Dental Health Month educational resources](#)
- [Smile, California: Resources for National Children's Dental Health Month](#)
- [ASTDD NCDHM Resource Kit](#)
- [Children Now NCDHM Social Media Guide](#)
- [Children Now NCDHM Website Guide](#)



Image courtesy of ASTDD

Teledentistry Resources & Reminders

COHTAC maintains a comprehensive and regularly updated Resource Center on their website, featuring vetted materials for LOHPs to use. Here are a few resources covering teledentistry, mobile dental vans, and virtual dental home models of care:

- [CareQuest teledentistry regulation and policy guidance](#)
- [DHCS Medi-Cal Dental teledentistry resources and quick reference guide](#)
- [Head Start teledentistry overview](#)
- [CDE overview of mobile dental clinics](#)
- [ASTDD overview of mobile and portable school dental programs](#)
- [Teledentistry best practices \(ASTDD report\)](#)
- [Forms of Teledentistry](#)

- [Collection of resources covering virtual dental homes](#)
- [Teledentistry and community learning help kids get care in North Carolina](#)
- [The Virtual Dental Home](#)

As always, email the [COHTAC](#) team with any questions or suggestions, and keep an eye on the website for new [resources](#), [news](#), and [events](#).

Promising Practice: Completing Kindergarten Oral Health Assessments (KOHA) Using AI-Supported Remote Assessment Process

Paul Glassman DDS, MA, MBA
Professor and Associate Dean for Research and Community Engagement
California Northstate University College of Dental Medicine

Recently, California Northstate University conducted a demonstration of Remote Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment (KOHA) system. The system had school personnel collecting information and taking photographs using a cell phone. All this information was analyzed by an AI system and reviewed by a remote dentist.

The results were published in the [Journal of the California Dental Association](#).¹ The article concluded that the methodology used in this demonstration produced results that were at least equivalent to, and in some cases better than, those achieved by an in-person dental hygienist when performing the KOHA. This process was done by a remote dentist using the provided support tools. The methods and systems demonstrated have the potential to enhance schools' ability to fulfill the California-mandated KOHA, ultimately contributing to improved oral health and greater oral health equity for students.



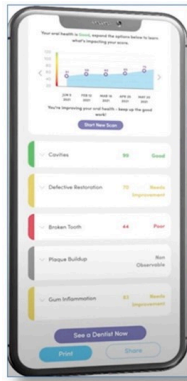
(a)



(b)

Images: A non-dental person taking mouth photographs at a school using a mobile phone and the Dental.com AI Smart Scan System

¹ Glassman P, Phillips V, Ibrhm A, Palmer M. Completing the Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment (KOHA) Using an AI-Supported Remote Assessment Process. CDA 2014, 52(1). <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19424396.2024.2414946>



Images: A sample Dental.com AI Smart Scan "wellness report."

Tuolumne County's 5-Year HRSA Grant Project: Virtual Dental Home, a Telehealth Model for Rural Schools

Smile Keepers, in collaboration with UCSF Dental School, is piloting a Virtual Dental Home (VDH) at a rural elementary school in Tuolumne County. The project's goals are to test if VDH services are effective and efficient for children's oral health as well as whether VDH services can be implemented on a larger scale. The grant supports Smile Keepers by providing preventive care and training opportunities for pediatric dental residents at UCSF Dental School, using a telehealth model. The video, which is less than 10 minutes, showcases the program in action.

The [Smile Keepers Dental Program](#) delivers services in all Tuolumne County Schools and preschool programs for approximately 4800 children annually. Services include preventive dental education, dental screenings, fluoride varnish applications, and referrals for families needing dental care.

Video: [The Smile Keepers Dental Program](#) (RT: 9:17)

LOHP Spotlight – Yolo County



Yolo County, home to around 220,000 residents and situated just west of Sacramento County, consists of four cities: West Sacramento, Davis, Woodland, and Winters. Primarily rural, the county is known for its agricultural farmland, small towns, and communities, as well as six public school districts.



The Yolo County LOHP was established in 2017 and has formed partnerships with several Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) to offer school dental screenings. One such FQHC, CommuniCare+OLE, launched a Virtual Dental Home (VDH) program at two elementary schools. The program provides passive consent screenings at the schools, while also offering families the option to access VDH services, which include oral health exams, cleanings, fluoride varnish, sealant placements, and referrals. Through VDH technology, patient charts and images are uploaded directly into their medical record system, streamlining follow-up for specialty care at their clinic locations.

The LOHP also collaborates with the private nonprofit organization, Center for Oral Health (COH), which conducts the Early Smiles program and partners with the Sacramento District Dental Society Foundation (SDDSF), Oral Health Solutions (OHS), Children Now, and Yolo County Oral Health Program (YCOHP) to assist underserved children in Yolo County. This program is funded by Dignity Health and Medi-Cal Dental Reimbursements, which includes active consent screenings, fluoride varnish applications at several schools, and coordinates dental referrals through the Sacramento District Dental Society (SDDS). Additionally, Elica Healthcare, another FQHC, has partnered with the same school district to offer on-site dental services using their mobile dental van and provide follow-up care for children referred through the COH screenings.



SDDS runs its own school screening program, which the Yolo County LOHP supports and participates with one school district. In this district, SDDS funds an oral health educational puppet show for all schools participating in the screening program. The children love the shows, and they have proven to be an engaging and effective way to promote oral health education.



In addition, the LOHP has a mascot, Mighty Molar, who regularly makes appearances at outreach events, including resource fairs across the county.

Please see the Yolo County LOHPs website for more information and to get in touch: <https://www.yolocountyhealthymouth.org/>

OOH Team Member Spotlight – Deepak Shrestha



Deepak Shrestha became a Program Consultant at the Office of Oral Health in April 2023, where he offers technical assistance to 13 local oral health programs (LOHPs). He particularly enjoys working with his programs to develop innovative strategies for enhancing oral health within their respective counties. Currently, Deepak is leading the planning workgroup for the upcoming Project Directors' Meeting scheduled for March 2025.

Originally from Nepal, Deepak is fluent in four languages—Nepali, Hindi, Maithili, and English—and also understands Newari and Punjabi. He earned his Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) in South India and went on to complete his master's degree at UC Davis, focusing his research on teledentistry. As a foreign-trained dentist, Deepak has worked with FQHCs and nonprofit healthcare organizations, gaining extensive experience in project and program management, as well as grant execution.

In his free time, Deepak volunteers at Nepalese community events, helping to promote and preserve tradition and culture. He enjoys singing karaoke, especially Nepali and Hindi songs, playing football (soccer), gardening, and taking long walks with his family. Deepak also sketches occasionally and is currently learning to play the guitar.

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