



**Whatcom County Oral Health  
Coalition Steering Committee:**

- Mark Brooks, DDS  
SeaMar Community Health Center
- Janet Davis, RN  
Whatcom County Health Department
- Grant Deger, MD  
Bellingham City Council
- Mary Jo Durborow & Carole Kornelis  
Readiness to Learn Coordinators
- Ken Gass, MD  
Madrona Medical Pediatrics
- Beverly Jacobs  
Community Member
- Maggi Kriger  
Access to Baby & Child Dentistry
- Wilanne Ollila-Perry  
Opportunity Council
- Chris Phillips  
St. Joseph Hospital
- Lesley Rigg  
NW Regional Council
- Marian Russell, RDH  
Toothfairy Dental Hygiene Care
- Jenny Shuler, CDA (Chair)  
Bellingham Technical College
- Anita Stolpe  
Dept. Social and Health Services
- Ken Taylor, DDS  
Lummi Tribal Health Center
- Fredrick Wicknick, DMD  
Oral Surgeon
- Jim McCallum, DDS  
General Dentist

# Oral Health Matters

## For Whatcom County



### Smile Survey Shows Severe Decay in Bellingham

By Cecily Fosso, RDH

Every 5 years, a statewide Smile Survey is conducted to obtain an estimate of the oral health status of Washington's children. The Whatcom County Oral Health Coalition asked the Whatcom County Health Department to conduct a local Smile Survey of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade children attending Bellingham public schools in conjunction with the statewide survey in 2005.

Data collected included demographic characteristics such as free or reduced lunch status (an indicator of low-income), as well as untreated decay (cavities), treated decay (fillings), permanent molar sealants, history of rampant decay, and treatment urgency.

The 84% response rate of Bellingham's 3<sup>rd</sup> graders utilizing passive consent netted 653 participants. Sixty percent had experienced tooth decay, treated and/or untreated. Low-income children presented with a 73% rate of tooth decay experience compared to a 53% rate for mid to high incomes. Twenty two percent of all third graders screened had decay experience severe enough to be considered rampant. Rampant decay is a measure of disease severity and is designated when seven or more teeth have treated and/or untreated cavities. Twenty percent were experiencing untreated decay at the time of the screening and referred to treatment with 2 percent designated as needing urgent care (due to pain, infection or swelling).

Reports of statewide 2005 data are not yet available however consistent survey design and calibration allow comparison of Whatcom County's 2005 data to the WA 2000 Smile Survey results. In this comparison Bellingham's third graders have significantly higher rates of rampant decay experience, twenty-two percent, than Washington's third graders at just fifteen percent. Considering the diagnostic limitations in the Smile Survey design it is apparent that even children who are not low-income have rates and severity of disease higher than might be expected by community members and private dental providers as well. This begs an obvious question: **is the severity of disease experience of our children acceptable?** Especially given the relative low cost, ease, and documented effectiveness of preventive measures such as water fluoridation, parent education, and placement of dental sealants?

As the examiner contracted by the Health Department to conduct the school screenings in Bellingham, I attended the statewide calibration workshop in Vancouver, WA moderated by Kathy Phipps, RDH, MPH, DrPh. To ensure valid and comparable data across the state, examiners were asked to follow a specific screening protocol, allowing only a strong penlight, mirror for retraction, toothpick to detect composites and tooth colored sealants, and cotton-tip applicator, toothbrush, or 2x2 gauze to remove food debris. No compressed air, dental explorers, radiographs or other electronic caries detection devices were utilized. A cavity was detected only when a screener could readily observe both a loss of at least 1/2 mm of tooth structure and brown or dark brown coloration of the walls of the cavity. When in doubt, screeners were told to be conservative and assume no cavity was present. This method of data collection is for health surveillance and will inherently underestimate disease rates.

The full Smile Survey report is online at:  
[http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/health/oral\\_health/index.jsp](http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/health/oral_health/index.jsp)



## Dental Community Volunteers to Help Children's Oral Health

100 children from across Whatcom County attended a free Sealant Day coordinated by the Mt. Baker Dental Hygienist Society on February 12<sup>th</sup> at Interfaith Community Health Center. Volunteers included dentists, hygienists, dental assistants, students, interpreters, and social workers. 66 volunteers donated approximately 500 hours of service. All children received a dental screening, oral health education, and fluoride varnish. 341 sealants were placed on 74 children.

Children attending the dental day were especially high-risk for dental disease: 58% had untreated decay, 79% had no dental insurance, 63% were low-income, and only 8% reported that they drink fluoridated water.

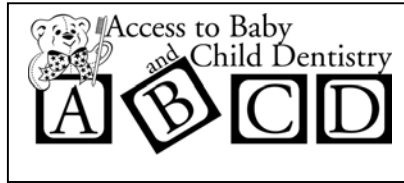
Many individuals and groups deserve appreciation for their contributions. Drs. Kimberly and Todd generously provided free follow-up treatment for children with urgent problems. Jenny Shuler, Bellingham Technical College (BTC), donated her time to teach the continuing education course for volunteers. 3M donated sealant material. Numerous dental offices and dental professionals donated money, supplies, and time. Readiness to Learn Coordinators advertised the event and encouraged high-risk children to attend. Representatives from Bellingham Community Service Office were onsite for Medicaid enrollment as well as Russian interpretation. Luisa Hicks from Sea Mar Community Health Center provided Spanish interpretation. Interfaith Community Health Center generously donated their space, equipment, and staff. Many BTC dental assisting students volunteered as well. A special THANK YOU to Deanne Simmons, RDH, and her team from the Mt. Baker Dental Hygienist Society for leading this effort. The tremendous success fueled desire to make this an annual event.

## Congratulations to Dr. Curt Smith



On March 15<sup>th</sup>, Curt Smith, DDS, retired from 45 years of dental practice in Bellingham. Dr. Smith has been and continues to be an active leader, locally and statewide. His father was the first director of Bellingham Technical College, and Dr. Smith started the college's dental assisting program. Dr. Smith was also instrumental in bringing the Access to Baby and Child Dentistry Program (ABCD) to Whatcom County in 2000. He is past president of Washington State Dental Association, current Associate Director of Washington Dental Service, a published author and active Rotary member. Dr. Smith is currently working to increase dental access for low-income adults to relieve burden on the emergency department. Thank you Dr. Smith for your contributions to our community.

**ABCD**



**CORNER**



## **Washington Earns an A for Child Dentistry Program**

*ABCD Now Operates in More Than Half of State's Counties*

Washington State received an "A" grade for effectively transferring science to practice by making early preventive dental care available to nearly 40,000 low-income children, according to a report card released in February by Oral Health America. The report card, "A for Effort," singles out Washington as one of eight states earning top grades for improvements in oral health.

"These programs can prevent oral disease in young children before it starts," said Robert Klaus, President and CEO of Oral Health America. "We hope that other states will follow Washington's strong example."

Access to Baby and Child Dentistry (ABCD), a public and private partnership between Washington's Medicaid program, the Washington Dental Service Foundation, the University of Washington, local dental societies, and local health departments, since 1995 has almost doubled the number of eligible children who receive dental services. ABCD programs now operate in more than half of Washington's counties including Whatcom County where it is administered by the Health Department.

ABCD encourages children to get their first dental check-up by age one. The program also counsels families on good oral health practices and provides access to other dental services. Dentists receive education in new techniques to treat very young patients. Participating dental practices also receive increased Medicaid reimbursements for most preventive and restorative services provided to enrolled children.

The dental offices are specially trained by UW Pediatric Dentistry Department in pediatric techniques and preventive services such as fluoride varnishes and oral health counseling. Further, UW plans to update the dental school curriculum to include ABCD techniques so that graduates are automatically certified as ABCD dentists. The Pediatric Dentistry Department is also engaging "dental champions" in each county to take leadership roles in recruiting and training ABCD dentists.

This model is working. Between years 2000 and 2002, the number of low-income children under age 6 seen by a private practice dentist in Whatcom County more than doubled. Between 2000 & 2003, the percentage of Whatcom children under age 2 seen by any dental provider jumped from 10% to 25%.

To further expand early prevention of dental disease, primary care physicians are beginning to scan for early signs of oral disease in well child exams, apply fluoride varnish and make referrals as needed.

Cavities are preventable; yet dental decay is the single most common chronic childhood disease — five times more common than asthma. Pain from untreated decay can keep children from succeeding in school and getting good nutrition, and losing baby teeth prematurely can mean more crowding and problems with permanent teeth. ABCD is now recognized nationally as a program that prevents problems such as these.

As of December 31, 2004:

- **4727 children have been enrolled in Whatcom ABCD (since 11/1/00)**
- **3594 have had ABCD dental visits**
- **Less than 6% no-show average reported**

For more info on Whatcom ABCD, contact Maggi Kriger at 738-2504 x32022 or mkriger@co.whatcom.wa.us



**EnviroStars Seeking Participation from Dentists**

The EnviroStars program is a regional Pollution Prevention Program. The program seeks to reward Whatcom County businesses who properly handle, dispose of, and reduce their hazardous waste. In 2005, the program is seeking participation from dentists. Presently, the program has one participating dentist, Dr. Les Seelye owner of Barkley Boulevard Dental Care. To be eligible for the program dentists must have an approved amalgam separator working in their practice. They must also properly label and dispose of their hazardous waste including fluorescent tubes, x-ray fixer, lead foils and scrap amalgam. Dentists who become certified EnviroStars will receive recognition through advertising such as radio ads on KPUG and KGMI, print ads in the Solid Solutions newsletter, and television ads on channel 10. They can also use the EnviroStars logo in their own promotions. The EnviroStars program has also created a local poster that helps dental businesses identify and properly manage their hazardous wastes. The poster is available free of charge. To contact EnviroStars to become a business member or get a poster call (360) 380-4640.

Whatcom County Health Department  
1500 North State Street  
Bellingham, WA 98225

