



## **DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Feb. 23, 2015

15-008

## **HAWAII DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH LAUNCHES HAWAII SMILES PROGRAM IN SCHOOLS**

HONOLULU – The Hawaii State Department of Health (DOH) is launching a new dental surveillance program at 64 public and charter schools across the state. The Hawaii Smiles program will be conducting voluntary oral health assessments of about 3,300 third grade students during this 2015 school year. Dental screenings began on Feb. 4 on the island of Hawaii and will continue through May.

“Dental health is a critical part of each child’s overall wellness; students need good oral health in order to speak with confidence, express themselves openly and to be healthy and ready to learn,” said Danette Wong Tomiyasu, deputy director of Health Resources. “Through the Hawaii Smiles program, the Department of Health will be gathering important data that will be used to improve the health of all children in Hawaii.”

The Hawaii Smiles program is designed to monitor the dental health of Hawaii students by gathering population-based data. To obtain a representative snapshot, DOH has offered the Hawaii Smiles Program to 64 randomly pre-selected elementary schools (out of 203 schools) located on the islands of Hawaii, Kauai, Maui, Molokai, and Oahu.

Findings from the Hawaii Smiles program assessment will be used to measure the effectiveness of preventive oral public health programs and initiatives. Results will be published and used to prioritize dental health needs and inform planning and policy decisions.

All participating students with a signed consent from a parent or caregiver will be given the opportunity to have a free dental screening to identify both treated and untreated tooth decay and preventive dental sealants. Parents and guardians will be informed of the screening results and whether their child requires urgent dental care. The screening will take about one minute per student. No x-rays will be taken and no dental treatment will be provided. Each participating student will receive a toothbrush/toothpaste kit and a letter to the parent or caregiver noting the results of the screening. There will be no cost to participating schools or families.

“The Department of Health expresses our appreciation for everyone’s contribution toward the health and well-being of our Hawaii keiki. This program would not be possible without the support of the dozens of dental professional serving as screeners and many partnering agencies,” added Tomiyasu. “In particular we would like to thank the Hawaii Dental Service Foundation for their generous grant of \$137,501 to support this oral health data surveillance project.”

The Hawaii Smiles project is a unique public-private partnership between the Department of Health, Department of Education, Hawaii Dental Service Foundation, and the Hawaii Primary Care Association. Dental professionals from the Hawaii Dental Association, the Hawaii Dental Hygiene Association, and the Lutheran Medical Center Pediatric Dental Residency Program will be performing the dental screening of children. Additional assistance for the project has been provided by many community volunteers including the Hawaii Medical Service Corps.

Funding for the project was provided by three federal grants (Centers for Disease Control State Oral Health Disease Prevention Program, the Centers for Disease Control Preventive Health and Health Services Block grant and the Health Resources and Services Administration State Systems Development Initiative Grant) and a grant from the Hawaii Dental Service Foundation.

Until recently, Hawaii did not have an ongoing and routine surveillance system for assessing the oral health of its residents and did not have a dental public health program within the State Department of Health. Because of this, Hawaii received a failing grade of “F” in three recent oral health report cards published by The Pew Center on the States, a division of The Pew Charitable Trusts. However, efforts such as the Hawaii Smiles Program are a critical first step in addressing these issues and ensuring better oral health outcomes for Hawaii in the future.



**Hawaii Smiles**

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