



Generations Health Care Initiatives
Northland Foundation
St. Louis County Public Health

Frequently Asked Questions

What makes Smiles Across Minnesota unique?

There are several unique characteristics to Smiles Across Minnesota. The program targets uninsured and underinsured children where they are located - in schools. The program also promotes the use of collaborative practice agreements, which allow dental hygienists to go into community settings, such as schools, and practice many basic preventive care services under a cooperative working relationship with a consulting dentist, but without general supervision. This is a benefit because parents do not have to take time off of work to have their children receive important dental care.

Who is Oral Health America and what is Smiles Across America?

Oral Health America is a national oral health advocacy organization whose mission is to increase public awareness of oral health's importance to total health. In 2004, Oral Health America established the Smiles Across America (SAA) program to provide preventive dental care to uninsured children in school-based settings. In 2005, SAA expanded to Minneapolis and St. Paul with the goal of promoting and establishing school-based dental care for uninsured and underserved children in Minnesota cities, school districts, and other community settings. In 2006, the Smiles Across Minnesota Coalition was established.

What is the Smiles Across Minnesota Coalition?

The Smiles Across Minnesota coalition is a group of dedicated volunteers who represent health, community, government, education and business organizations committed to increasing oral health education and improving oral health care delivery systems for all Minnesota children. The primary goals are:

- To prevent and reduce dental disease for all Minnesota children, focusing on underserved and uninsured children.
- To support school- and community-based access points that increase the number of underserved children getting basic dental care.
- To support cost effective preventive dental care.
- To promote education for good oral health.

The Smiles Across Minnesota Coalition's Advisory committee consists of representatives from the following organizations: [3M ESPE](#), [Children's Dental Services](#), [Delta Dental of Minnesota](#), [GC America](#), [Greater Twin Cities United Way](#), [Minnesota Head Start Association](#), [Normandale Community College](#), [Park Dental Resource Group](#), [Suburban Ramsey Family Collaborative](#), and [United Way of Greater Duluth](#).

For more information on the Smiles Across Minnesota Coalition, please email: arogers@deltadentalmn.org.

How did Smiles Across Minnesota Duluth get started?

The Smiles Across Minnesota expansion into Duluth began in 2007 with an agreement between Children's Dental Services (CDS) and the Duluth Public School Board. Starting in late-January 2008, CDS will employ a Duluth hygienist to provide basic preventive dental services, such as cleanings, sealants and fluoride treatment to underserved and uninsured children in Duluth Public Elementary Schools and Head Start Centers. United Way of Greater Duluth has worked closely with Smiles Across Minnesota to engage local partners and to generate the necessary additional resources to launch this program in Duluth.

Why do you think Smiles Across Minnesota is a good fit for the Duluth community?

Smiles Across Minnesota is a good fit for Duluth because we believe it will ease the burden of dental disease in the Duluth community by reaching typically hard to reach populations. The program meets a critical need for dental care in a community that has significant shortages in access to dental providers. Smiles Across Minnesota does this by employing dental providers from Duluth who know the community and bring care directly to those children with the greatest needs.

How does the program work?

The *Smiles Across Minnesota -Duluth* program works in a three steps:

1. Schools send consent forms home for parents to sign and return.
2. All children who have returned consent forms will receive free dental assessments at their school from Children's Dental Services Duluth Dental Hygienist and Assistant. Depending upon the individual needs of each child, fluoride treatments, sealant applications and cleanings may be provided.
3. This program is for uninsured and underinsured children. [If a family already has commercial dental insurance, those children and their parents will be encouraged to visit their previously established dental home for their dental care needs.]
4. Children identified as needing additional restorative care will be referred back to their dental home or dentist. If they do not have a primary dentist, the child will be referred to either a local dentist who is open to serving new patients or to Lake Superior Community Health Center Dental Clinic.

Which Duluth elementary schools and Head Start programs are participating?

Any interested elementary schools may participate; currently those participating include: Lowell, Lincoln Park, Nettleton, Macarthur, Stowe, Piedmont, Congdon Park, Grant and Homecroft.

Is this program voluntary?

Yes. Families will receive a consent form that is sent home with the children. On the consent form parents and caregivers choose whether they would like their child to be involved or not.

What if my family has commercial or private dental insurance?

This program is for uninsured and underinsured children. If a family already has commercial dental insurance, those children and their parents will be encouraged to visit his/her previously established dental home for dental care needs.

Will my child receive care?

Only if a consent form is returned to the school; then your child will receive preventive care. If your child has already established a dental home, then all services will be referred to his/her dentist.

What services will my child receive?

The type of services provided will include assessments, cleanings, sealants, and fluoride. Children may not receive all of these services; rather it will depend on the clinically indicated needs of each child.

When will these services begin?

An exact schedule is not yet determined, but schools will be scheduled throughout the school year (when an adequate number of consents have been received for that location).

Aren't dental services too costly to provide in schools?

No. In fact, Smiles Across Minnesota provides preventive dental services at no cost to the child or school.

Aren't children anxious about getting dental care in a school setting ...especially when parents are not present?

Not really. School-based dental services have been well received by children. When classmates are also receiving care, the services seem less threatening and the children respond positively.

Why are the schools providing care? Isn't it the parent's responsibility, not the school, to ensure that children have good oral health?

Unfortunately, many parents cannot afford or access dental care. Smiles Across Minnesota allows schools to help children receive necessary preventive care in order to stay healthy.

How do dental sealants make a difference in a child's oral health?

Dental sealants are plastic coatings that prevent dental decay when applied to the chewing surfaces of molars. Dental sealants are proven to be effective in preventing dental decay. Sealants have been shown to reduce dental decay on the chewing surfaces of back teeth by 60 percent over a five-year period. They are 100 percent effective when fully retained.

What outcomes do you anticipate with Smiles Across Minnesota?

- Smiles Across Minnesota program has been operating in Minneapolis and St. Paul schools for 3 years and has now expanded into the Duluth Public Schools.
- Anticipated outcomes for the program include the following:
- Prevent and reduce dental disease for all Minnesota children, primarily focusing on underinsured and uninsured children.
- Increase the number of school and community-based access points that result in an increased proportion of children utilizing the oral health system.
- Raise the visibility and value of children's oral health.
- Increase healthy behavior with education and activities promoting good oral health.
- Provide preventive services including sealants and fluoride treatments to 10,000 uninsured and underinsured children of Minnesota.
- Increase education efforts to parents as well as businesses, government and public health officials.
- Oral health behaviors and healthy habits will improve as a result of the educational, outreach and other prevention components of the program.

What are the most important things that you would like Duluth families and the Duluth community to know about this project?

The Smiles Across Minnesota program has received significant local support. Meeting with the community leaders was an important first step. In fact, it is the strong partnerships that are the hallmark of the success of this program.

What are some key things that families can do to promote good oral health?

Good oral health is an important component for healthy smiles and overall health care – just like exercising, eating right and taking care of the rest of your body. Maintaining good oral health is easy and important for total wellness:

- Brush and floss every day.
- Eat a balanced diet and limit in between meal carbohydrate snacks. Drink water instead of soda or sugary drinks.
- Make regular dental visits.
- Use fluoride toothpaste and drink fluoridated water after meals to help cleanse the teeth.
- If you're pregnant, see your dentist at least once during your pregnancy.
- Your child's first dental visit should coincide with their 1st birthday.
- Tell your dentist about your medical conditions and medications, because they may affect your oral health.
- If you use tobacco products, quit.
- Wear protective gear like mouthguards during sports and be sure to wear a seat belt.
- Know first aid for tooth emergencies.

For more information on Smiles Across Minnesota, please visit www.unitedwayduluth.org or www.deltadentalmn.org.