

# Oral Health Assessments for California Schoolchildren Policy Statement

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The need to improve the oral health of California's children is well documented. The 2000 Surgeon General's report, *Oral Health in America*, identifies children as an underserved population in need of more resources and oral health care. The 2005 California Oral Health Needs Assessment reported 54% of kindergarteners and 71% of third graders have a history of tooth decay and more than 25% of elementary school children have untreated decay. Furthermore, caries disproportionately affects children of migrants, in lower socioeconomic strata, and certain racial/ethnic groups.

To address children's oral health, several states have passed legislation mandating oral health exams or assessments upon school entry. In 2005, CDA sponsored AB 1433 (Emmerson/Laird) making California one of eight states that mandate oral health assessments. This landmark legislation requires children to have an oral health assessment by May 31 of their first year in public school, at kindergarten or first grade. Dental check-ups that occurred within the 12 months prior to the start of school fulfill this requirement. If parents are unable to obtain an oral health assessment for their child, they may sign a waiver excusing them from this requirement.

The goal of AB 1433 is to establish a regular source of dental care for every child, identify children who need dental treatment, and to identify barriers to receiving care. The law is California's vehicle to identify children with unmet oral health needs and to help ensure children are ready to learn when they start school. The importance of oral health is rising to the level of other required school health exams, including hearing and vision.

CDA remains committed to improving the oral health of California's children and to ensuring AB 1433 continues to operate successfully.