



County of Santa Cruz

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

Public Health Division



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Press Release

For Immediate Release

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FEBRUARY IS NATIONAL CHILDREN'S DENTAL HEALTH MONTH

Santa Cruz County, CA— Every February, the American Dental Association observes National Children's Dental Health Month to bring together thousands of dedicated professionals, healthcare providers, and educators to promote the benefits of good oral health for children.

According to the California Department of Public Health, cavities, also known as tooth decay, are the most common chronic disease in the United States during childhood. If left untreated, cavities cause pain and infections that can lead to problems with speaking, playing, eating, and learning. The good news is that tooth decay is preventable.

The Santa Cruz County Local Oral Health program (LOHP) employs many strategies to prevent tooth decay in children including providing oral health education and resources to families, conducting trainings to community partners about ways to integrate oral health into pre-existing programs, working with parents, school districts, and dental providers to conduct kindergarten oral health assessments (KOHA), and expand school-based dental programs. The LOHP also supports the coordination of the Coalition, Oral Health Access (OHA) Santa Cruz County where partners come together to address children's oral health needs.

"Connecting more children to a dental provider through the KOHA has been an ongoing priority for the LOHP and with our OHA partners," said Monica Nicholas, Project Director of the Local Oral Health Program. "The number of children with a completed KOHA increased from 43% in the 23-24 school year to 61% in the 24-25 school year. Additionally, the percentage of children with untreated tooth decay decreased from 14% in the 23-24 school year to 9% in the 24-25 school year."

“Families in our community are fortunate to have such a strong network of partners focus on oral health, from Santa Cruz County’s LOHP to our OHA coalition. Together, 24 organizations are working to make a real impact on improving the oral health of our county residents,” said Sheree Storm, Chief Strategy Officer of Dientes Community Dental Care and Co-Chair of OHA.

Both Dientes Community Dental Care and Salud Para La Gente provide comprehensive pediatric dental care at multiple locations throughout the county, accepting private insurance, Medi-Cal, and a sliding scale fee schedule determined by income. Cabrillo’s Dental Hygiene Program provides hands-on student learning through their affordable dental clinic open to the community, including children.

Schedule your child’s next dental appointment today:

- **Dientes Community Dental Care:** Call (831) 218-5341 or visit <https://dientes.org/>
- **Salud Para La Gente:** call or text (831) 728-0222 or visit splg.org
- **Cabrillo Dental Hygiene Clinic:** Call (831) 479-6431 or visit <https://www.cabrillo.edu/dental-hygiene-clinic/>

This February, the LOHP and OHA partners are hosting a social media campaign that focuses on children’s oral health education and milestones for caregivers and families.

Follow them on Instagram and Facebook @PublicHealthSCC for helpful reminders and the latest news.

Resources:

- OHA’s newest Strategic Plan and local oral health data: [Oral Health Access Progress Page | DataShare Santa Cruz County](https://oralhealthsc.org/progress-page/)
- To learn more about the LOHP and tips on how to keep your family’s smile healthy, visit: www.santacruzhealth.org/oralhealth.
- For OHA information visit: <https://oralhealthsc.org/>

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