

Oral Health

Group and School Age Child Care and Family Child Care Licensing Policy Statement

Number: P-EEC-11

606 CMR 7.11 (11)(d): Educators must assist children in brushing their teeth whenever they are in care for more than four hours or whenever they consume a meal while in care.

Background and Regulatory Intent:

This regulation is intended to increase awareness of the importance of good oral health practices for the Commonwealth's children. National research indicates that dental caries (tooth decay) is the most chronic childhood disease, five times more common than asthma. If untreated, dental caries results in cavities, pain, infection and, in some instances, devastating consequences for a child's overall health, including sickness and mortality. Primary (baby) teeth have a much thinner layer of enamel compared to adult teeth. Therefore, young children are more at-risk for tooth decay, which usually progresses more quickly than it does in adult teeth. Untreated dental caries can inhibit learning, speech, and eating, leading to problems in school and poor nutrition. U.S. children lose more than 51 million school hours due to dental-related illness, according to a 2000 report of the Surgeon General.

The Catalyst Institute's 2008 study on the oral health of Massachusetts' children found that more than one-in-four kindergarten children had evidence of dental decay, with nearly half of those children having untreated dental decay. The proportion of children from low-income families with untreated decay was at least double that of comparable groups.¹

Dental caries and oral disease are almost entirely preventable. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "When done routinely and properly, tooth brushing can reduce the amount of plaque which contains the bacteria associated with gum disease and tooth decay."

Application of this requirement to licensed programs:

- This regulation applies to all licensed programs that children attend for more than four hours per day.
- This regulation also applies to all licensed programs where children have a meal (not a snack)² while in care, regardless of the length of time the children are in care.
 - Programs where children eat more than one meal must assist children with tooth brushing only once during the program day.

¹ White BA, Monopoli MP, Souza BS. Catalyst Institute *The Oral Health of Massachusetts' Children* January, 2008

² 606 CMR 7.12(10)(b) requires that children in care for less than four hours receive nutritious snacks. Children in care for more than four hours must receive meals in addition to snacks.

- Tooth brushing need not follow a meal; it can be scheduled at any time that best fits the program's curriculum.
- This regulation does not apply to licensed school age programs when children are in care only before and/or after school. It does, however, apply during school vacation weeks and the summer months if children attend for more than four hours per day or have at least one meal during the program day.
- A program that relies on parents to provide tooth brushes or tooth paste for their children must have extra supplies on hand should a child forget to bring the needed supplies to the program.
- Programs that elect to charge parents a fee to cover the cost of tooth brushing supplies must limit their fee to a nominal amount. Fees must not be applied in a manner that may discourage parents from having their child participate in tooth brushing. Programs that elect to charge fees must be "soundly administered" as required by 606 CMR 7.04(1). Any fee information must be included in the written fee schedule provided to parents, as required by 606 CMR 7.08(6)(g). **Please note** that programs may not charge parents receiving a subsidy through an EEC contract or voucher additional fees, beyond the parent fee established by EEC.
- Programs must encourage children to brush their teeth and assist them in doing so. Children must not be forced to brush their teeth.

Parental choice regarding this requirement:

This regulation creates an opportunity to provide families with resources and information about the importance of good oral health. It is also an opportunity to educate young children regarding good dental hygiene practices. However, EEC supports and respects parental choice.

- Individual parents who do not want their child (ren) to brush their teeth while in care must make a request for non-participation in writing. Programs may use the attached sample form. This request must be maintained in their child's record.
 - Like other information in a child's record, this request to opt out of tooth brushing must be updated annually as required by 606 CMR 7.04(9).
- Licensees should inform parents of this non-participation option and give them an opportunity to decide whether their child should brush teeth while in care.
- Licensees cannot require, compel, or solicit parents' decision not to have their child participate in tooth brushing because of the program's reluctance to implement this requirement. Programs must be prepared to assist children with tooth brushing as required by this regulation.

SAMPLE

Oral Health Non-Participation Form

In January 2010, EEC issued new regulations for child care programs that include a requirement that educators assist children with brushing their teeth if children are in care for more than four hours or if children have a meal while in care [606 CMR 7.11(11)(d)]. This regulation is intended to:

- Help children learn about the importance of good oral health
- Provide information and resources regarding good oral health to child care programs and families
- Help address the high incidence of tooth decay among young children in Massachusetts, which is associated with numerous health risks.

EEC licensed programs must comply with this regulation. However, parents may choose that their child (ren) not participate in tooth brushing while present at the child care program.

You do not need to fill out this form to have your child (ren) participate in tooth brushing while they are in child care. However, if you do not want your child to brush his or her teeth while s/he is attending the child care program, please fill out the information found below. A separate form must be filled out for each child in care. This form must be renewed annually and will be kept in your child's record at the program. Should you change your mind and wish for your child to participate in tooth brushing, this form may be withdrawn at any time by requesting in writing that it be removed from your child's file. Thank you.

I do not wish to have my child participate in tooth brushing while in care at

_____ (Name of Program)

Child's Name: _____

Parent/Guardian's Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

If you have any questions or concerns, please call:

_____ at _____
(Contact Person at Program) (Phone Number)