Guidance for Providing Mass Dental & Vision Screening and Dental Preventive Services at Schools, Childcares and Programs for Children and Youth

March 4, 2021

The following Tip sheet was developed by the San Francisco Department of Public Health to provide recommendations about how to provide mass dental and vision screenings (and certain dental preventive measures) at schools, childcares, and programs for children and youth while protecting against COVID-19 transmission.

This guidance is not for individual health assessments of children and youth with pre-identified risk factors or concerns. Those children should receive appropriate screening and services (including hearing screens) through their healthcare providers and/or assessment teams.

It will be posted at http://www.sfcdcp.org. This Tip sheet may change as information is updated.

AUDIENCE: Staff and teachers at schools, childcares, and programs for children and youth; healthcare providers performing vision and dental screening; and parents of children who may receive health screenings.

BACKGROUND: Dental cavities are significant cause of health problems in young children and can lead to pain, infection, and problems eating, speaking, playing, and learning. Screening and prevention measures—such as applying fluoride varnishes and dental sealants—are effective ways to prevent dental cavities in children. Measures can be taken to protect against COVID-19 transmission while providing dental services.

Similarly, vision abnormalities in young children can lead to injuries, difficulty learning, and poor self-esteem. Early detection of vision abnormalities is important because for some conditions, the effectiveness of treatment decreases with age. Measures can be taken to mitigate against COVID-19 transmission while providing vision screening services.

At this time, SFDPH is not recommending mass hearing screens in community settings for children without pre-existing language or hearing concerns. This is because hearing screening evaluations require the child and healthcare provider (and potentially other individuals) to share small, indoor, and often poorly ventilated spaces for prolonged time periods. This makes it difficult to protect against COVID-19 transmission, particularly in non-healthcare settings. As noted above, children with pre-identified risk factors or concerns for hearing loss, including those who have not received hearing screens at birth, should receive appropriate screening and services through their healthcare providers.

Recommendations

Prepare for vision and dental screening/prevention services

Schools and childcare programs should work with healthcare providers and their agencies to plan for safe, efficient, and successful screenings.
• Identify an appropriate area for health screening services
  o All **dental** screening and prevention services must be provided outdoors; **vision** services may be provided indoors or outdoors.
  o Outdoor spaces may be covered with a tent, canopy, or other shelter, as long as the shelter complies with: (1) CDPH’s November 25, 2020 guidance regarding “Use of Temporary Structures for Outdoor Business Operations” (available at [https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Use-of-Temporary-Structures-for-Outdoor-Business-Operations.aspx](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Use-of-Temporary-Structures-for-Outdoor-Business-Operations.aspx)); and (2) SFDPH’s guidance on “Safer Ways to Use New Outdoor Shared Spaces for Allowed Activities During COVID-19” (available at [https://www.sfdph.org/dph/files/ig/Guidance-Shared-Outdoor-Spaces.pdf](https://www.sfdph.org/dph/files/ig/Guidance-Shared-Outdoor-Spaces.pdf)).
  o Ensure that there is enough space for children to wait their turn with at least 6 feet of distance between them. Consider placing signs on the floor to help with spacing.

• Determine who will receive screening/prevention services on a given day
  o When identifying children for services, note that education programs may have alternating days of in-person attendance and providers may need to visit facilities multiple times to screen all eligible children.
  o Children currently isolated or quarantined may not receive health screening services. Consider whether alternate dates and times may accommodate these children, if they otherwise would have been eligible to receive screening services.

Health screeners and students should follow existing safety protocols

• Screen the healthcare provider(s) upon entry to the facility for COVID-19 symptoms and exposure
  o The dental or vision healthcare provider should be a considered a visitor on campus and receive the same symptom and exposure screening given to all visitors.
    ▪ For more information about screening, see [sfcdcp.org/screen](http://sfcdcp.org/screen).
  o Trainees of dental or vision providers may accompany the supervising provider to the facility and participate in screening and preventive services, subject to the rules and regulations of their licensing agencies and educational institutions. Trainees must follow the health and safety guidance provided in this document and by their educational institution.
  o Record information about visiting healthcare provider(s) (such as their name and date-of-visit, for example). This may be important if a positive COVID-19 case is discovered later on.

• Follow existing safety practices about personal protective measures
  o All children should perform hand hygiene before receiving health screening
  o All children should wear face coverings (unless already exempted by existing policies) and maintain at least 6 feet of physical distancing until told to do otherwise by the healthcare provider.
Limit the number of children waiting in the screening area based on available space. If necessary, call one child at a time to the screening area.

- At most, only children within an already existing school group or cohort should be sent to the health screening area at the same time
- If multiple groups of children will be receiving services on the same day, children from different groups should not wait in line together. A second group can line up for services after the entire first group is finished.

- Record the names, dates, time-in, and time-out of children who received health screening. This may be important if a positive COVID-19 case is discovered later on.

Protect against COVID-19 transmission during screening services

- When performing health screening and prevention services, dental providers should:
  - Follow health protocols and use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) as determined by their Employer, with consideration of guidance from OSHA, available at https://www.osha.gov/coronavirus/control-prevention/dentistry
  - Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces and any shared equipment in between students

- Vision screeners should:
  - Maintain at least 6 feet of physical distance between screener and the student at all times, except when the evaluation requires closer distancing (such as using SPOT photoscreeners or near vision screening)
  - Wear face coverings at all times and consider wearing a face shield if they anticipate being less than 6 feet from children
  - Use disposable equipment as much as possible, such as disposable eye patches or disposable occluders, for vision examinations
  - Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces and any shared equipment in between students

Notify SFDPH if COVID-19 infection is later confirmed or suspected

- If a child develops symptoms or test results concerning for COVID-19 within 14 days of receiving a health screening, the school or program should immediately notify the SFDPH Schools Hub and provide a list of services and visiting providers that may have been close contacts of the child.

- If a dental or vision provider develops symptoms or test results concerning for COVID-19 within 14 days of performing health screening at childcare facilities or schools, the provider or their agency should immediately notify the SFDPH Schools Hub and include information about all the schools or programs visited in the 14 days prior to the result.

- Further instructions are available at sfdcp.org/COVIDSchoolsChildcare

Resources

- San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH)
  - COVID-19 General Information
COVID-19 Information on Schools, Childcare, and Youth Programs
https://www.sfcdcp.org/COVIDSchoolsChildcare

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- COVID-19
- Oral Health

Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA),
Information for Dentistry Workers
https://www.osha.gov/coronavirus/control-prevention/dentistry

American Dental Association,
COVID-19 Safety and Clinical Resources

US Preventive Services Task Force
Vision Screening Recommendations
https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/recommendation/vision-in-children-ages-6-months-to-5-years-screening

Prevent Blindness,
Considerations for Children's Vision Screening Programs During the Covid-19 Pandemic
https://preventblindness.org/covid-19-childrens-vision-screening/

American Association of Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus
Pediatric Vision Screening Guidance during the COVID-19 Pandemic
https://aapos.org/education/allied-health/covid