FACT SHEET

Good oral health prevents pain, suffering, missed days of school or work and unnecessary costs due to dental treatment.

WHY IS GOOD ORAL HEALTH IMPORTANT?

- Dental related illness causes poor children to “miss” 12 times more school days than children from higher income families.\(^1\)
- Poor oral health has been associated with other medical problems including heart disease and premature births.\(^2\)

IS THERE AN ORAL HEALTH PROBLEM IN ALABAMA?

- Two out of every five Alabama schoolchildren are estimated to have untreated tooth decay.\(^3\)
- Almost 70 percent of low-income children in Alabama did not visit a dentist last year.\(^4\)
- Alabama has about 30 percent fewer dentists statewide than the nation (38 dentists in Alabama versus 54 per 100,000 population nationally) and our dentists are not distributed evenly.\(^5\)
- One-third of all Alabamians over age 65 have no teeth, the 9\(^{th}\) highest percentage in the country.\(^6\)

HOW DO WE RANK?

- Alabama is the 4\(^{th}\) lowest in the nation in terms of per person spending for dental care.\(^7\)
- 141 persons die from mouth and throat cancer in Alabama each year (8\(^{th}\) highest in the nation) and approximately 550 persons in the state will be diagnosed with this cancer each year.\(^8\)
- Only 34 percent of low-income adults in Alabama visited a dentist in the past year compared to 46 percent of low-income adults nationally.\(^9\)
- Only 48 percent of Alabamians over age 65 visited a dentist in the past year compared to 62 percent of persons nationally.\(^10\)
1 Centers for Disease Control, Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, “Chronic Disease Prevention Effectiveness Fact Sheet, 2002.”
3 Centers for Disease Control, Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, 1999.
5 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Service Administration (HRSA), Health Resources and Services Administration Workforce Study.
10 Ibid.

Healthy Smiles, Healthy Children