



NEWS

from the Consumer Health Action Network

Fall 2009

Taking Care of Your Smile

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Why Is It Important To Have Excellent Oral Health Habits?

The health of your mouth shows the general condition of your whole body. When your mouth is not healthy, your overall health is probably not as good as it could be. If your mouth is in great shape (clean gums and teeth and no cavities) you feel well because your overall health is good. An unhealthy mouth leads to poor oral health that can show up as either a cavity or gum disease. An unhealthy mouth happens because bacteria can build up in your mouth when you are not brushing and flossing your teeth every day.

Tooth decay (or a cavity) is an infection that can lead to more serious infections or cause problems in the whole body for both children and adults such as heart disease. Cavities and gum disease in both baby and adult teeth can make serious medical problems like diabetes more difficult to treat. The bacteria that cause both tooth decay and gum disease can be spread from one person to another person – this is because both conditions are an infection!

Neglected teeth can have cavities or gum disease and cause pain so your child cannot pay attention in school or adults have to miss work. More seriously, untreated decay or infections in baby teeth can cause damage to the developing adult teeth.

Good habits can begin at any stage of life; make sure other family members brush their teeth and gums at least twice a day for at least two to three minutes. Before bedtime is the most important time to brush your teeth. If possible, all family members should brush their teeth after each meal. Most importantly, do not forget to floss!

Where to Get Dental Care

If you have HUSKY, Medicaid or SAGA, to find a dentist near you, call the Connecticut Dental Health Partnership Customer Service Line at **1-866-420-2924**, Monday through Friday, 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. If you have private insurance you will need to call your insurance plan to find a dentist that accepts your insurance. There should be a customer assistance phone number on your card or member handbook.

If you are uninsured, there are local dental clinics which have reduced rates for dental services. There are also some dentists who will set up a payment plan for you and your family. To locate a clinic near you, call the Consumer Action Health Network at **1-888-873-4586** or InfoLine at 211.

Please note, there are dental vans which may go to different schools and provide basic or simple screening services. Contact your child's school to find out if a van program will be at the school and learn about the services the program will provide.

Understanding Federal Health Care Reform

Cerella Craig, Intern

Federal health care reform; you've seen it on TV, you've read about it in the news, but do you understand what this means for your health care? President Obama has eight goals for health care reform.

- Protect families from bankruptcy because of health care bills
- Give people a better choice of doctors and health plans
- Improve the safety of patients
- Focus on preventing disease
- Make sure everyone can afford **good** health insurance
- Let people keep their health insurance after they lose their jobs
- Help for people with pre-existing conditions
- Make health care affordable for businesses and government

Here are some of the main issues covered in the health reform bills by the Senate and House health committees in Congress.

The Individual Mandate- Everyone must have health insurance or they will be fined. People who can't afford insurance will be exempted from the mandate. Insurance will have to cover most services – so you will be buying something that will really cover you when you need it. An insurance exchange will be created by government to help you sort out the options and certify that the plans are complete.

Individual Subsidies- People are given credits to buy health insurance. The amount of the credit depends on your income.

Expansion of Medicaid, Medicare and HUSKY

Public programs like Medicaid and Medicare will be offered to all low income people, whatever your age, whether or not you have children. Get rid of or decrease the waiting period for Medicare for people with disabilities. Treatment to help you quit smoking will be included.

The Public Option- There is still disagreement on this point. The idea is to offer an option to people that doesn't involve private insurance companies – maybe run by government, maybe run by the plan members. No one would be forced to take this option. If you are happy with your coverage now, you can keep it. The plan would be one of the insurance choices that are included in the exchange. It would be paid for with your insurance premiums, just like private insurance is – it just wouldn't be run by an insurance company.

Pre-existing Conditions- Insurance companies will not be able to deny health insurance or increase the price of insurance because you already have a medical condition.

If you want to call your Congressman to let them know what you think of federal health reform, call us toll-free for their contact information at 1-888-873-4585

PCCM has a new name – HUSKY Primary Care

The Primary Care Case Management program, a way of running HUSKY without HMOs, has been renamed HUSKY Primary Care. As part of the program you can sign up with a doctor or clinic, who you will go to for most health care needs. Your doctor will keep track of your medical records, find you a specialist when you need one and provide after hours care. If you would like to know more about HUSKY Primary Care, call us toll-free at 1-888-873-4585.

Right now HUSKY Primary Care is available in the Greater Waterbury or Willimantic areas. It will be expanding to the New Haven and Hartford areas by the end of the year. If you live in these areas and would like to sign up for HUSKY Primary Care, call the HUSKY Program toll free at 1-877-CT HUSKY and tell them you want to sign up.

Results from our Consumer Survey

About two thirds of the people who answered our reader survey had health insurance; the other third are uninsured. About two thirds also said that the economy has affected their ability to pay for health care and they've had to cut back on services like seeing doctors, buying prescriptions, paying insurance premiums, and paying co-pays or deductibles.

Here's some of the advice or tips you had for other consumers to get healthy and save money:

- Check out free local health fairs and community health centers
- Don't use the ER just because you're having trouble seeing a doctor
- Find out about prescription drug assistance programs
- Be careful of Health Discount Cards

Here are some of the health care topics you'd like to know more about:

- Affordable, comprehensive health insurance.
- Low-cost dental care.
- Many believe we need better programs to educate people about the different types of health insurance.

The Consumer Health Action Network has tip sheets on these and other topics, in English or Spanish. For help with these or other problems, call us toll-free at 1-888-873-4585.