

Encouraging the Media to Cover the Issue of Early Childhood Caries (ECC) *5 Tips for Health & Children's Advocates*

Tip #1: Target your outreach. Instead of sending email messages to every reporter you can think of, take a targeted approach. Do a Google search to see which local reporters, if any, have written about oral health or other health issues. Identify one or more reporters at your local newspaper who cover health issues. Think beyond newspapers. Consider TV, radio and online media outlets. Many radio and TV stations have public affairs shows that cover state/local health issues. Check the websites of these media outlets to find names and email addresses.

Tip #2: It takes a story to write a story. In other words, reporters will be much more likely to write a story about the challenge of early childhood tooth decay if you, in turn, can share a story that help them “put a face” on the issue. Finding a parent to tell her family’s story is ideal. Work through your professional network to see if anyone can suggest a parent with a good oral health story to tell. It also helps to identify a dentist and/or pediatrician who are willing to talk about the impact of cavities on a young child’s life and what parents can do to keep their child’s teeth healthy. It is best to pitch a singular story rather than provide options for the reporter. Know what story you want to pitch and pitch it confidently.

Tip #3: Focus on your state and community. More than ever, media outlets are looking for news stories that focus on their state or local audience. This means that national data — example: nearly 1 in 4 children have had a cavity — are less interesting to them. Instead, local media would like to see oral health data for their state (and any local data, if available). Keep this in mind when you look for data that illustrates the ECC challenges that your city, county or state is facing.

Tip #4: Remember the visual. If you are trying to get a TV reporter interested in a story, remember “the visual.” A TV reporter needs to have a visual component as part of the story. For this reason, try to pitch a story that has a strong visual element. For example, if you are telling a story about how a program reduced childhood cavities, the TV reporter will most likely want to interview a health professional about this program and shoot video showing a child receiving oral health services in a dental office, school or clinic. If so, make sure you can facilitate the reporter’s needs by finding (in advance) a dental/medical practice or clinic that is willing to accommodate them. For TV news, no visual means no story.

Tip #5: Sell your story with confidence. First, send a “pitch email” to the reporters, producers or other person in the media whom you are targeting. Second, consider following up with a phone call. You don’t have to be a slick salesperson. Just introduce yourself, tell them the story and let your natural enthusiasm show for the importance of the story. It is best to pitch a single story rather than provide 2-3 options for the reporter. Know the story you want to pitch and pitch it with confidence. Your message should be right-to-the-point—something like the message on [the next page](#):

R.I.'s New Strategy: Reduce Childhood Cavities by Starting Prevention before Birth

Almost half of all 3rd grade children in [Rhode Island](#) have experienced a dental cavity. Research [shows](#) that tooth decay makes kids more likely to miss school and get lower grades. Yet many pregnant women don't know that their dental health is a [strong predictor](#) of their newborn's risk for tooth decay. That's why the Rhode Island Department of Health has launched a program that focuses on pregnant women.

The Department [recently received](#) a federal grant from the Health Services and Resources Administration (HRSA) to help connect more pregnant women to dental care and raise awareness of how their oral health will affect their newborn child's oral health.

Please let me know if you'd like to hear more about this program. It would make a great story for your readers. Contact me at: judy.johnson@rihealthdept.gov and 401-222-2222.

If possible, include hyperlinks within the text of your pitch email. This is a good way to demonstrate that you have a solid command of the issue and can direct reporters to helpful resources.