

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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DepEd to stop absences by focusing on kids health

The Department of Education has pilot tested a comprehensive oral health care and general hygiene program for school children to reduce infectious diseases by 30-50% and dental problems by 40-50%.

Education Secretary Jesli Lapus said that toothache, diarrhea, respiratory ailments and soil-transmitted worm infections are prevalent in pre-school and school children causing absenteeism and dropping-out of school.

"It is socially accepted, often neglected when it fact it can be prevented at a low cost," Lapus stressed.

He added: "These diseases are considered "normal," despite their huge impact on the physical and mental development of children, their school performance and their quality of life."

Most of the diseases are caused by hygiene problems. Studies by DepEd showed that these diseases can be controlled by simple, cost-effective preventive measures implemented on a mass scale in schools and day care centers.

Thus, the government partnered with local government units and the private sector in the soft launch in Tarlac recently of the Essential Health Care Package (EHCP) program. It has been introduced last year where it benefited some 600,000 children in 20 provinces.

In earlier program launch in selected schools, President Gloria Macapagal Aroyo demonstrated proper hand washing to school children.

The package -- which is distributed to pre-school up to grade 6 students -- contains a toothbrush, a toothpaste and a soap. Each package costs P25.

"We will continue deworming and hand washing activities as well as distributing oral health care package until we can make personal hygiene and oral health an unshakeable habit among our school children," the education chief stressed.

Participating schools will conduct daily hand washing with soap and water. A nail-cutter will be made available in classrooms to keep the fingernails groomed. Daily supervised tooth brushing drills using fluoride toothpaste will be done in schools. Moreover, deworming tablets will be provided by the Department of Health and will be administered by school health personnel twice a year.

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The National Oral Health Survey (NOHS) conducted by DepEd from November 2005 to February 2006 revealed that nearly all children have dental caries, with an average of 9 decayed teeth in every mouth, 85% from very severe dental decay with pulp involvement, mean number of 3.4 teeth with pulp involvement and 20% reported to have problem in their mouth.

The situation is not better in 12 year olds, the caries prevalence is 82%, and half of all 12 year olds suffer from severe dental decay. The mean DMFT is 2.9; on the average each child has one tooth with pulp involvement and 16% percent has a problem in their mouth.

The school's well organized administrative structure and teaching personnel will be tapped to implement health programs focusing on the behavior change. The principals, health personnel and teachers will have orientation on EHCP for implementation and monitoring.

"These health improvement measures are intended to increase school attendance, improve school performance and help the government achieve its Millennium Development Goals," Lapus noted.

The EHCP program for SY 2009-2010 of the DepEd's Health and Nutrition Center had its soft launch in Cristo Rey East Elementary School in Capas, Tarlac.

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