

Healthy Smiles gives kids something to chew on



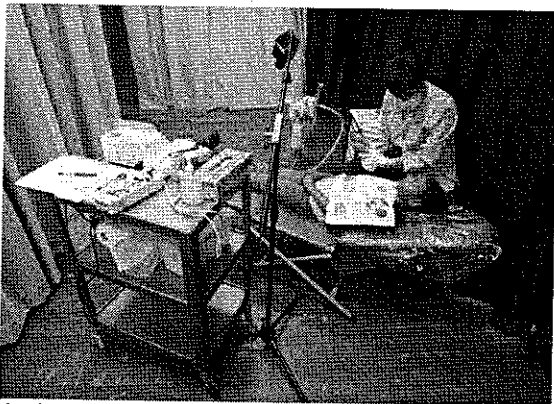
Area students learn about preventive dental practices through free program

By Ann Marie Bush
The Capital-Journal

Published Monday, February 18, 2008

Kira McMillon opened wide for Kathy Hunt last week. The 10-year-old fourth-grader listened carefully as the registered dental hygienist counted her teeth.

While other students took part in physical education classes in the gymnasium at Avondale East Elementary School, the two chatted behind a closed curtain on the school's stage. Hunt asked Kira how often she brushed her teeth each day.



Anthony S. Bush / The Capital-Journal

Hunt shows Kira the proper way to brush her teeth.

"Two times," Kira said. "Once in the morning, and once before I go to bed."

Hunt congratulated the Avondale East Elementary School student and continued with the oral exam.

Kira is one of several Avondale East Elementary School students who are getting a hands-on lesson about how to care for their teeth thanks to Healthy Smiles, a program offering free preventive dental services to children who qualify for free and reduced lunches. The program is free for children who have Medicaid or HealthWave and is offered at reduced rates for others.

"The big thing is oral health care education," said Hunt, who is the administrator for the Healthy Smiles Community Dental Hygiene Program.

The services are offered through a registered dental hygienist who has received an Extended Care Permit and has partnered with Marian Clinic, a nonprofit clinic based in Topeka sponsored by the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth Health System.

Portable dental equipment is taken to area schools and set up in a private area of the school. Children who qualify for the program are brought in for an assessment and cleaning, as well as other preventive procedures, such as sealants and

LEARN MORE

For more information on how your school can become involved, call Charlotte Rinsley at Marian Clinic at (785) 233-8081.

BY THE NUMBERS: ORAL HEALTH IN KANSAS

In Kansas, 21 percent of third-grade students have untreated dental decay, according to Oral Health Kansas, a statewide coalition dedicated to improving oral health in Kansas.

- About 28 percent of children entering Head

Start programs have dental decay.

- One out of three Kansans using public water systems don't receive fluoridated water.
- Almost half of Kansans aged 65 years and older have lost six or more teeth.
- Eleven counties in Kansas have no dentist.
- There are only 22 pediatric dentists in the state of Kansas.
- Ninety of Kansas' 105 counties are considered underserved by the federal government and are designated dental health shortage areas.
- An average of 51 million school hours are lost each year because of dental-related illnesses.

SOURCE: Oral Health Kansas

fluoride treatments.

Healthy Smiles began in area schools in November 2006. It also is active at Family Service and Guidance Center's preschool and area long-term health care facilities.

"It's been great," said Duke Palmer, principal of Avondale East, 455 S.E. Golf Park Blvd. "It's been a great asset to our school."

Treatments are offered to families who qualify at no cost. Once a child has been seen by a registered dental hygienist, the school nurse follows up with the family and can help make arrangements to take care of any restorative dental care that needs to be completed.

Many low-income families don't have access to preventive dental services, Hunt said, and may not know how important dental health is to children.

"You can die from tooth decay," she said.

A child should be seen by a dentist within six months of getting his or her first tooth, Hunt said. Children also should brush in the morning after breakfast and before bedtime for two minutes with fluoride toothpaste.

During a Healthy Smiles visit, the dental hygienist will help the child take a tour of his mouth and answer any questions.

"It helps them learn to be a good dental patient," Hunt said.

Erica Anderson has been a nurse at the school for seven years and said the program has been easy for her. The program, Anderson said, helps parents who can't provide transportation to a dental clinic or dentist and it also cuts down on the amount of time a student is away from the classroom.




Jacob Dougan-Redman, a kindergartner at Avondale East, said he enjoyed his visit through the Healthy Smiles program and wasn't afraid.

Kamree Burgess, a 9-year-old third-grader, said she learned a lot from her visit.

"I try to brush them twice a day now," she said.

Ann Marie Bush can be reached at (785) 295-1207 or ann.bush@cjonline.com.

Reader comments are the sole responsibility of the person posting them. You agree not to post comments that are off topic, defamatory, obscene, abusive, threatening or an invasion of privacy. Click here for our full user agreement.

You can rate each comment by clicking the  or  buttons. To report an inappropriate comment, click the .

Reader Comments

There are no comments. Be the first to post one.

Post your own comment

Your Name: **jessicabarr**

Health

Healthy Smiles gives kids something to chew on

Copyright 2008 The Topeka Capital-Journal