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February Observed as Children's Dental Health Month in Harford County

Posted By [Dagger News Service](#) On February 9, 2012 @ 5:59 pm In [Local](#) | [No Comments](#)

From the Harford County Department of Health:

Bel Air, MD – February 7, 2012 – National Children's Dental Health Month is observed every February, emphasizing the need for parents to take action early to ensure the health of their children's teeth. Each February since 1949, the American Dental Association (ADA) has sponsored National Children's Dental Health Month to raise awareness about the importance of oral health.

"Many people are unaware of the important role early dental care plays in children's overall health, and that attitudes and habits established at an early age are critical in maintaining good oral health throughout life," states Harford County Health Officer, Susan Kelly. The Harford County Health Department reminds the public that tooth decay is the most common chronic disease found in children, occurring five times as commonly as asthma and seven times as commonly as hay fever. Each year, more than 50 million school hours are lost due to dental related problems. Fortunately, with good oral health care habits, tooth decay can be prevented.

According to the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 18 percent of children ages two to four have experienced tooth decay, and nearly one out of six have untreated tooth decay. By age 17, more than seven percent of children have lost at least one permanent tooth due to decay. In Maryland, 31 percent of kindergarten and third grade children have tooth decay that, if left untreated, causes pain and infections that can lead to problems with eating, speaking, playing and learning.

"Taking care of your children's teeth, including baby teeth, from the very start is the key to good oral health," continues Ms. Kelly. "A child should visit the dentist when his or her first tooth appears, or by his or her first birthday." She goes on to stress to parents the importance of serving as role models and teaching their children good oral (dental) health care habits, including proper brushing and flossing techniques, eating nutritious foods and making regular visits to the dentist.

Since opening its facility in March, 2008, the Health Department has offered dental services to children who may never before have had a dental exam in a county that, at one time, had one of the highest rates of dental disease in the state. The clinic provides a dental home and has demonstrated remarkable success responding to their oral health care needs of more than 5,000 of the 15,000 children, aged 1 – 20, and pregnant women enrolled in Maryland's Medical Assistance Program.

Start-up funding for the dental clinic was made possible through the generosity of the Maryland Community Health Resources Commission, the Dresher Foundation, and state and county support. However, Mrs. Kelly notes that, in addition to its productivity, the dental program also has succeeded in achieving another important goal. Apart from receiving a small annual state grant, the facility, located at 2204 Hanson

Road in the Edgewood Plaza Shopping Center in Edgewood, has generated sufficient revenue to be self-supporting and to complete an expansion project. The number of dental chairs recently was expanded from three to five in order to accommodate the growing number of children and pregnant women enrolling in Medical Assistance.

"In addition to offering cleanings, oral examinations, fluoride treatments, sealants, and fillings, the clinic will now offer some oral surgery and endodontic services (root canals) on site two days a month," says Marcy Austin, Dental Clinic Manager. "These expanded and invaluable services will eliminate some of the need to refer patients out for specialty care so that children and pregnant women can receive a full array of general and specialty services in their dental home."

"The benefits of creating a public health dental clinic in Harford County translates even further than improving oral health," explains Dr. Harry Goodman, the State's Oral Health Program Director, and a resident of Harford County. "Providing dental services also improves a child's general health and self-esteem, prevents chronic health problems, and reduces school absenteeism rates resulting in higher academic achievement."

For more information about Harford County's public health dental clinic or to schedule an appointment, please call (443) 922-7670. Additional information on childhood dental health can be obtained by visiting www.harfordcountyhealth.com ^[1] or www.fha.state.md.us/oralhealth/ ^[2].

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[1] www.harfordcountyhealth.com: <http://www.daggerpress.comwww.harfordcountyhealth.com>

[2] www.fha.state.md.us/oralhealth/: <http://www.daggerpress.comwww.fha.state.md.us/oralhealth/>