Seal! North Dakota offers school-linked services

Helping North Dakota’s students

North Dakota’s dental sealant program – Seal! North Dakota – has gained a willing partner, a little momentum and some hope for the future. Bridging the Dental Gap of Bismarck has joined forces with the North Dakota Department of Health’s Oral Health Program and will be providing services to some local school children in February.

On February 22, the clinic staff will provide screenings and dental sealants to second graders from Bismarck’s Jeannette Myhre Elementary School. The students will be bused to the clinic and those who need them will have sealants applied to their 6-year molars. The students also will receive a packet to take home that includes a toothbrush, literature for the parents and the results of the clinical visit.

According to Robyn Stearns, Oral Health Program manager at the North Dakota Department of Health, the services offered by Bridging the Dental Gap is coming at the perfect time.

“February is National Children’s Dental Health Month, a time when we promote the importance of oral health in children,” said Stearns. “We’re very excited that Bridging the Dental Gap has offered to help some of our local school children, providing them with the dental services they so desperately need.”

Bridging the Dental Gap will continue the free dental sealant program, offering a day of services during each quarter. Their service area encompasses towns and rural areas within a 50-mile radius of Bismarck, so schools within that range will be the ones to receive services.

The clinic may be able to recover some of its costs if any of the students qualify for Medicaid.

The need for Seal! North Dakota

As a part of North Dakota’s U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) oral health grant, the state must start a school-based dental sealant program. This has proven to be a challenge since according to North Dakota state law, a dental hygienist cannot perform services unless he/she is under “general” supervision of a dentist. Since a dentist is not available to supervise the public health hygienists who would perform services in school settings, it has proven difficult to arrange a way to provide the needed school-based sealant program.

The future of Seal! North Dakota

Other safety net clinics in the state have expressed interest in providing services but are currently dealing with paperwork and funding requirement issues that must be ironed out before they can participate. Funding also is being sought to increase the services provided by Seal! North Dakota.
Head Start Dental Home Initiative active in North Dakota

The Head Start Dental Home Initiative is a partnership between the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry and the Office of Head Start. The goal of the initiative is to make sure every Head Start child in America has a dental home – a place they can get a continuous and available source of prevention and treatment in a comprehensive manner.

In North Dakota, there are 21 Head Start programs and about 3,500 enrolled children. Since many of these children are Medicaid-eligible, it is sometimes difficult for them to access dental offices due to limited Medicaid participation by dentists. The North Dakota Dental Association endorsed the Initiative in 2008. Since then, efforts have been directed at establishing networks of dentists who will partner with their local Head Start programs to provide screenings and, ultimately, dental homes for kids.

In September 2009, the North Dakota Head Start Initiative received a $10,000 grant from the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry and Head Start to provide oral health educational resources and curriculum to Head Start staff and families, as well as to help fund organizational and travel costs for the state leadership group.

In the last few months, visits have been made to the Standing Rock and Turtle Mountain Head Start programs to help identify problems and offer help.

Future activities include development and distribution of educational resources, continued technical assistance to local programs, and building the provider networks.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Brent L. Holman, state leader for the initiative, at:

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Give Kids a Smile events help children in need

In February 2009, 34 dentists from across North Dakota volunteered to provide free dental care to children during the annual Give Kids a Smile Day events. Dentists and dental professionals in Bismarck, Devils Lake, Grand Forks, Mandan, Wahpeton and Williston served 449 children – providing $49,000 worth of services such as x-rays, fluoride treatments, dental sealants, fillings, extractions and oral health education.

“We know there are many families in North Dakota without the ability to pay for dental services and many children who are suffering because they don’t have access to care,” said Kimberlie Yineman, director of the North Dakota Department of Health’s Oral Health Program. “It was wonderful to see so many dental professionals offering their time and talents to the Give Kids a Smile Day events – helping to make a difference in the lives of children.”

A program of the American Dental Association, Give Kids a Smile Day is observed every year on the first Friday of February. This national event is designed to provide education, preventative and restorative care to children from low-income families. February is also National Children’s Dental Health Month, an ideal time to provide additional education about oral health to all children and parents.

Along with dentists and their staff members, many others contributed to the 2009 events – including local dental coalitions, local public health units, social service agencies, the North Dakota Dental Association, the North Dakota Department of Health, the North Dakota Dental Foundation, the American Dental Association, Sullivan Schein, Patterson Dental and many community volunteers.

The 2010 Give Kids a Smile Day will be observed February 5. Any dental professionals who would like to sponsor an event in February or who would like to donate their services to another local event should contact Yineman at 701.328.4930. Any other organizations or volunteers who would like to contribute or become involved also can contact Yineman.

“The 2009 events were great successes,” said Yineman. “We’re hoping that more dental professionals and other volunteers will join the effort in 2010 and we will be able to help more of North Dakota’s children feel better and smile more.”

Items Available

Tips For Healthy Teeth fact sheets for ages birth to 21 years are available for use in dental offices. To print these fact sheets, go to www.ndhealth.gov/oralhealth and click Fact Sheets and Brochures.

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Join the North Dakota Oral Health Coalition

The North Dakota Oral Health Coalition (NDOHC) represents public, private and nonprofit organizations and individuals interested in developing and promoting innovative strategies to achieve optimal oral health for all North Dakotans.

If you are interested in joining the coalition, complete and mail the application below, call 701.328.2356 or 800.472.2286 (press 1), or send an e-mail to cebach@nd.gov.

North Dakota Oral Health Coalition
Membership Application

Name: ____________________________
Title: ______________________________
Organization: ______________________
Mailing Address: ____________________
City, State, Zip: _____________________
Telephone: __________________________
E-mail Address: _____________________

Send to: North Dakota Oral Health Coalition, North Dakota Department of Health, 600 E. Boulevard Ave., Dept. 301, Bismarck, N.D. 58505-0200.