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Oral health education, dental sealants offered to youth

NEWS RELEASE
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IRON RIVER—Prevention is an important part of health care and oral health is no exception. Through a program of the Michigan Department of Community Health, many students at West Iron County Schools recently learned about proper oral care and had the opportunity to have their teeth safeguarded by long-lasting dental protectants.

Known as the Seal! Michigan Dental Sealant Program, it was held for students in first, second, sixth and seventh grades during late October and early November.

“These are the ages where back teeth are erupting. They’re more susceptible to decay in these early years,” said Ellen Moilanen, a registered dental hygienist at the Dickinson-Iron Dental Center in Crystal Falls who administered the program.

For the education component of the program, Moilanen spoke with first and second graders about the importance of proper brushing, flossing, diet, and the use of fluoride and dental sealants.

“If everyone knew about these five aspects of oral health and practiced them, cavities would be almost non-existent,” she said.

Moilanen presented similar information to the sixth and seventh graders, but she also talked about choices that can be detrimental to oral health such as use of tobacco, oral piercings and consuming beverages that contain sugar and acids. In all, 254 students attended the education component of the program.

With signed permission slips from their parents and guardians, 52 children received oral health screenings. Dental sealants and fluoride varnish treatments were then applied to the teeth of children who needed them.

“Tooth decay is very preventable, but it’s the most common disease of childhood. It can lead to other health issues, unnecessary pain and expense,” said Moilanen. “Dental sealants are an effective way to prevent tooth decay in permanent teeth. The material fills in the tiny pits and grooves on the chewing surfaces and keeps plaque and germs out.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention strongly recommends dental sealants as an effective method for preventing tooth decay. It also notes that school-based sealant programs reduce disparities for children and can lower costs for all participants.

In a national survey, Michigan scored second lowest among all states in percentage of third graders (23 percent) who have had their teeth protected with dental sealants.

“That percentage drops to 17 percent when you’re talking about uninsured third graders. It’s a very high risk group for cavities,” Moilanen said.

The SEAL! Michigan Dental Sealant Program was launched in 2007 to reduce cavities among the state’s children. The treatments are free to all families. Dental insurance plans are billed for children who have dental coverage. For more information visit www.michigan.gov/oralhealth.

(The Dickinson-Iron Dental Center is a part of a federally qualified health center known as the U.P. Association of Rural Health Services, Inc. For more information about the association visit www.upruralhealth.org).

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