

News

Community Health Center offers free dental care for kids

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NEW BRITAIN — It was 6-year-old Tatiana Ortiz's first visit to the dentist as she happily departed the Community Health Center with her siblings, Elijah Osorio, 10, and Samantha Marrero, 3.

"I have no cavities, but my tooth is wiggly," Tatiana said proudly. "My brother got a cavity, though."

About 90 children in the city who participated in Give Kids a Smile Day at the center received a full dental check-up and tips on how to maintain or in some case improve oral health. It was part of a national campaign offered free of charge to children with Husky state insurance or with no dental insurance at all.

According to Yvette Highsmith-Francis, director of Community Health Center's Hartford County sites, each year an estimated one in five, or 17 million, American children go without dental care. In an effort to increase access to oral health services, CHC joined with private dental practices to meet demand.

CHC also established the New Britain Oral Health Collaboration that includes Head Start; a supplemental nutrition program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC); private dentists; the Visiting Nurses Association; and the city Health Department. The group has pushed the state to ensure more dental providers are eligible to receive Husky reimbursements.

"Together we can help organize a response to the needs," Highsmith-Francis said.

Charise DiPierro, program manager for CHC, said about 20 percent of children receiving care from CHC are uninsured.

CHC has a mobile dental program called Start Smiling in which a dental chair and equipment is set up at schools to aid children. Parents are able to have their child seen by a dentist without having to take them out of school or worry about transportation. If a child needs further care, parents receive notice of how the check-up went and a referral.

"Oral care is very important. More children are out of school due to dental care than asthma," Highsmith-Francis said. "It has a negative impact on academics and long-term effects as well."

Each year on the first Friday of February, thousands of dentists and dental teams participate nationally in Give Kids A Smile Day, providing free oral health care services to underserved children. The campaign highlights for policy-makers the challenges that low-income families face in finding dental care.

For more information on Husky insurance or available free dental care for children call (860) 852-0853. The Community Health Center in New Britain is at 85 Lafayette St.

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