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Dental Check-Ups Reduce Childhood Tooth Decay and Missed School Days

Shasta County Launches Back-Tooth-School Activities to Remind Parents and Caregivers of the Importance of Children's Oral Health

Redding (August 16, 2021) – Healthy teeth not only help children eat, speak and sleep better; they also help them to perform better in school. Studies show children who have poor oral health often miss more school and receive lower grades than children who do not.¹ To ensure students keep a healthy smile this coming school year, Shasta County Public Health suggests that parents and caregivers get their children regular dental check-ups.

Cavities, which are largely preventable, remain the most common chronic childhood disease. In the Northern California Region, more than 51.6% of students have experienced tooth decay by the third grade.² To help address the issue, Shasta County Public Health launched a local media campaign and is participating in educational outreach opportunities in community settings. These activities are in support of a larger statewide effort implemented by the California Department of Public Health's Office of Oral Health and the Medi-Cal Dental Program's campaign—*Smile, California*—to help Medi-Cal members make use of their dental benefits.

"Visiting the dentist before school starts should be at the top of every family's back-to-school checklist, along with school physicals, vaccinations and school supplies," said Ayah Ali Local Oral Health Program Director. "Regular dental check-ups allow the dentist to provide consistent preventive treatments, such as sealants and fluoride treatments. Regular visits also allow children to feel more comfortable at each visit, increasing the chances of them continuing regular dental check-ups as adolescents and adults."

California requires that all children have a comprehensive Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment by the time they enter public school. The assessment identifies children suffering from untreated dental disease and helps parents and caregivers find a family dentist.

¹ Griffin SO, Wei L, Gooch BF, Weno K, Espinoza L. Vital Signs: Dental Sealant Use and Untreated Tooth Decay Among U.S. School-Aged Children. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2016;65:1141-1145

² California Office of Oral Health. 2018-2020 Third Grade Basic Screening Survey.

“Regular check-ups discover problems that could cause pain and potentially even harm a child’s self-confidence and overall school performance, if left untreated,” said Alani Jackson, Chief of the Medi-Cal Dental Services Division within the California Department of Health Care Services. “Medi-Cal Dental is here to help. We provide free or low-cost check-ups every six months for members under the age of 21 and molar sealants up to the same age.”

To find a Medi-Cal dental home near you or to download *Back-Tooth-School* resources, including informational flyers, videos, fact sheets, presentations and social media images, visit the [Oral Health and School Readiness page](#) at SmileCalifornia.org and SonrieCalifornia.org.

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