

## Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

February 16, 2012

Steve Todd, Health Officer  
517-279-9561, ext. 148  
Theresa Christner, Health Ed./Health Promotion Dir.  
517-279-9561, ext. 144

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Rock Your Smile!**

Every February, the American Dental Association (ADA) sponsors **National Children's Dental Health Month** to raise awareness about the importance of childhood oral health. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency wants to remind you and your children to ***"Rock Your Smile"*** by starting good oral hygiene habits at a young age to prevent early childhood tooth decay. It's also important to teach children good habits so they can carry them into their adulthood.

Baby teeth are just as important as permanent adult teeth. Baby teeth help children chew, talk and hold space in the jaw for the permanent teeth that are developing under the gums. The American Dental Association strongly urges parents to schedule their child's first dental visit as soon as their first tooth erupts and no later than 12 months of age.

Why so early? Early childhood caries (ECC) is a disease that can start as soon as an infant's teeth erupt, usually around 6 months of age. It can progress very quickly and have a lasting, damaging impact on a child's health. This disease is defined as the presence of one or more decayed, missing or filled tooth surfaces in any primary tooth in a child between birth and 6 years of age. ECC has the potential to affect speech and communication, nutrition, productivity and quality of life.

According to Theresa Christner, Health Promotion and Health Education Director, "Starting good oral hygiene practices at a young age is the best way to prevent early childhood caries (cavities) and to ensure good oral health into their adulthood." The following are a few tips on how to start good oral hygiene practices with your child:

- Provide a balanced diet.
- Discourage sugary liquids during the day or while in bed.
- Make sure infants finish their bottles before going to bed.
- Encourage children to drink from a cup by their first birthday.
- Wipe your baby's gums with a clean gauze pad or towel after feeding

At age 2, brush your child's teeth with a pea-sized amount (small smear) of fluoridated toothpaste and teaching them to spit the toothpaste out. Children also should start to learn how to brush their own teeth. By age 3, children should have their first set of all 20 primary teeth. Their mouth will start to grow to make room for their permanent teeth around the age of 6. At this time, they will start to feel their first set of teeth becoming loose and fall out. This allows room for the four permanent six-year molars to come in. At this age, children should start brushing their own teeth for two minutes, at least two times a day, with a pea-sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste. Between the ages of 8 and 10, children should be taught how to use dental floss. They should also be taken to the dentist for regular check-ups.

Worrying about how you will pay for services to care for your child's teeth? The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency offers public health dental clinics for qualifying adults and their families with no insurance, or individuals who are on Medicaid. Steve Todd, Health Officer for the tri-county health department says, "Oral health means more than just an attractive smile. Poor oral health and untreated oral diseases and conditions can have a significant impact on quality of life. And, in many cases, the condition of the mouth mirrors the condition of the body as a whole. We know that failure to get regular dental check ups increases the risk of developing gum and other diseases. Our public health dental clinics are available to assure everyone in the jurisdiction can access quality dental care."

The public health dental clinics accept both adults and children on Medicaid. They also accept low income, uninsured individuals. Individuals whose incomes are

below 200% of the Federal poverty income (i.e., below \$44,100 for a family of four) and who are without dental insurance coverage, can enroll in the Michigan Community Dental Plan for a one time fee of \$50. This fee entitles them to an oral examination, x-rays, treatment plan and a reduced fee schedule on treatment and procedures. There are currently two public health dental clinics available:

- Three Rivers Dental Clinic  
721 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite B  
Three Rivers, MI 49093  
269-273-3247
- Hillsdale Dental Clinic  
20 Care Drive, Suite D  
Hillsdale, MI 94242  
517-437-2654

The clinics provide a variety of services including oral exams/cleaning, fillings, tooth removal, teeth replacement including dentures and partial dentures, emergency treatment and fluoride treatment. To learn more about our dental clinics and how to set up an appointment, visit our website at [www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org) and click on the dental clinic link. Remember: Good dental health is an important part of a healthy lifestyle ... so be sure to “Rock Your Smile!”

# # #