



Branch - Hillsdale - St. Joseph Community Health Agency

570 N. Marshall Road
Coldwater, MI 49036
(517) 279-9561
Fax (517) 278-2923

20 Care Drive
Hillsdale, MI 49242
(517) 437-7395
Fax (517) 437-0166
www.bhsj.org

1110 Hill Street
Three Rivers, MI 49093
(269) 273-2161
Fax (269) 273-2452

"Your Local
Health Department"

NEWS RELEASE
February 8, 2017

Rebecca Burns, Health Officer
517-279-9561, ext. 0148#

Val Newton, Prevention Services Director
517-279-9561, ext. 0143#

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Give Kids a Healthy Smile!

Coldwater, MI. Many parents across the country will issue a common refrain at dinnertime tonight: "You'd better eat that--it's good for you!" There's another old favorite in the parental arsenal of dietary admonitions: "Don't eat that—it'll rot your teeth!" Now more than ever, kids are faced with a bewildering array of food choices -- from fresh produce to sugar-laden processed convenience meals and snack foods. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency, in partnership with the My Dental Health Centers, (MCDC) want parents to know that what children eat and when they eat it can affect ***both their general health and their oral health.***

Americans are consuming foods and drinks high in sugar and starches more often and in larger portions than ever before. It's clear that —junk foods and drinks gradually have replaced nutritious beverages and foods for many people. For example, the average teenage boy in the U.S. consumes 81 gallons of soft drinks each year! Alarming, a steady diet of sugary foods and drinks can ruin teeth, especially among those who snack throughout the day. Common activities may contribute to the tendency toward tooth decay include:

- Grazing habitually on foods with minimal nutritional value, and
- Frequently sipping on sugary drinks.

When sugar is consumed over and over again in large, often hidden amounts, the harmful effect on teeth can be dramatic. Sugar on teeth provides food for bacteria, which produce acid. The acid in turn can eat away the enamel on teeth.

Almost all foods have some type of sugar that cannot and should not be eliminated from our diets. Many of these foods contain important nutrients and add enjoyment to eating. But there is a risk for tooth decay from a diet high in sugars and starches. Starches can be found in everything from bread to pretzels to salad dressing, so read labels and plan carefully for a balanced, nutritious diet for you and your kids.

The tri-county health department and MCDC recommend the following to reduce your children's risk of tooth decay:

- Sugary foods and drinks should be consumed with meals. Saliva production increases during meals and helps neutralize acid production and rinse food particles from the mouth.
- Limit between-meal snacks. If kids crave a snack, offer them nutritious foods.
- If your kids chew gum, make it sugarless – Chewing sugarless gum after eating can increase saliva flow and help wash out food and decay-producing acid.
- Monitor beverage consumption – Instead of soft drinks all day, children should also choose water and low-fat milk.
- Help your children develop good brushing and flossing habits.
- Schedule regular dental visits.

If you lack dental insurance or can't find a provider who accepts your dental insurance, MCDC (My Community Dental Centers) can help. They offer four convenient locations within the tri-county area. **Call 877-313-6232** to schedule an appointment, including: Hillsdale, Coldwater, Three Rivers and their newest location opening soon in Sturgis. These four centers are operated by MCDC on behalf of the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency – your local health department. To learn more about these public health dental centers, visit the health department's website at www.bhsj.org and click on the blue Dental Centers button on the sidebar. To find this service or other local health services that can help you and your family stay healthy, visit our webpage at www.bhsj.org or like us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/bhsjwic>.

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