



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
January 29, 2016
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HEALTH
DEPARTMENT
of Northwest Michigan

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Children’s Dental Health Month encourages good habits from young age

CHARLEVOIX – Dental Clinics North, a partnership of local health departments and My Community Dental Centers, reminds you to give your child a smile that lasts a lifetime. February is National Children’s Dental Health Month, which focuses on the importance of regular dental check-ups and a balanced diet. Children should brush, floss, rinse, and eat nutritious snacks to maintain a healthy smile.

“A solid foundation in dental health starts at a young age,” said Dawn Marie Strehl, RDH, Oral Health Coordinator for the Health Department of Northwest Michigan. “Good habits should begin with a visit to the dentist as soon as the child gets their first tooth, or before their first birthday.”

A balanced diet, limited snacks, daily brushing and flossing, and regular check-ups are the keys to healthy teeth and gums. Bottles and pacifiers also impact a child’s oral health. Here are some tips from the American Dental Association to keep a young child’s mouth healthy:

- Place only formula, milk or breast milk in bottles. Avoid filling the bottle with liquids such as sugar water, juice or soft drinks.
- Infants should finish their bedtime and naptime bottles before going to bed.
- If your child uses a pacifier, provide one that is clean—don’t dip it in sugar or honey, and don’t put it in your mouth before giving it to the child.
- Encourage children to drink from a cup by their first birthday, and discourage frequent or prolonged use of sippy cups.
- Serve nutritious snacks and limit sweets to mealtimes.

Older children should follow the same rules of regular brushing, flossing, dental visits and eating a balanced diet. Juice and soft drinks are particularly damaging, due to the presence of sugars and acids. Sugars and starches encourage the production of plaque, which can attack tooth enamel; the acid in soft drinks decays teeth.

Dental Clinics North serves those who are uninsured, as well as those enrolled in the Healthy Michigan Plan, Healthy Kids/Delta Dental, MICHild and the Northern Dental Plan. Its eight Northern Michigan locations include Alpena, Cheboygan, East Jordan, Petoskey/Harbor Springs, Gaylord, Mancelona, Traverse City, and West Branch. For more information or to schedule an appointment with Dental Clinics North, please call **(877) 321-7070** or visit www.nwhealth.org.

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego Counties.