

NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Contact: Sarah Minnick, Program Manager 308-345-4223

Polish Your Pearls Dental Program

According to the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD), tooth decay is the most common chronic childhood illness in the United States and the most preventable of all health problems. Tooth decay is a big problem in southwest Nebraska. Polish Your Pearls is a grant-based dental program implemented by Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) that helps supplement regular dental visits to provide optimal protection against cavities for children. This program is available to local daycares and schools to provide oral health screening, dental education, and application of fluoride varnish.

“Since this program has been providing dental care in daycares and schools in 8 of the 9 counties, we have learned that the lack of dental knowledge and dental care in our health district is a bigger problem than we thought,” says Sarah Minnick, Program Manager. “With Polish your Pearls, we have seen children with large cavities in their teeth and even teeth missing because of decay. After each dental exam with a licensed hygienist, a note is sent home with the child to inform the parent of the results. We help parents find a dentist if one is needed, but this can be very challenging for parents since the health district lacks dental Medicaid providers. This means people have to drive several hours away to find a dentist willing to see them, which, even then, is not always possible.”

SWNPHD has been working with local agencies to help provide oral health care to children by organizing a group of partners to discuss different options and opportunities. One of the partners is Angie Paisley, school nurse from Chase County Schools, which has been a long-time participant in the Polish Your Pearls dental program. During the partner meetings Paisley organized an activity to provide toothbrushes to parents who visit Chase County Immunization Clinic’s (CCIC) Vaccines for Children (VFC) program, administered through Chase County Community Hospital and Clinics. This effort was made possible by the Imperial Community Foundation, who graciously provided the funding to purchase the toothbrushes. “I see many children every year who are experiencing mouth pain and other issues with their teeth that disrupt their focus, learning, and causes short term and life-long health issues,” Paisley says. “By the time we see these children in kindergarten, the decay has already become so advanced that they need major dental care. We need to continue to educate parents before their children enter school. We want to do whatever we can to help these children get a healthy start in life.”

This work is ongoing, with oral health projects in Chase County and throughout the health district. These projects will include more planning with partners, providing more education and basic dental care to children, securing transportation to specialty dentists, and increasing preventive services within the school system, among other possibilities. Anyone interested in participating in the oral health group can contact Sarah Minnick at SWNPHD at 308-345-4223.

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. You can follow us on Facebook and Instagram or view the website at www.swhealth.ne.gov which contains many resources and additional information helpful to prevent disease, promote and protect health. Call (308) 345-4223; one number three locations, McCook, Imperial, and Ogallala.

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