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Dickinson-Iron District Health Department Supports Better Dental Health for School Kids through Good Nutrition

Kingsford and Iron River, MI, September 1, 2015 - A new school year is just around the corner and Kelly Rumpf, Health Educator with the Dickinson-Iron District Health Department which is part of the U.P. Wide Smiles Oral Health Initiative wants parents to remember that nutrition and good dental health go hand in hand. Packing nutritious lunches and snacks for your children helps them function better in school and, as a bonus, helps promote healthier teeth. Food, drinks, and snacks that are loaded with sugar are not good for teeth and can't supply children with energy for learning.

According to Rumpf, "An estimated 51.7 million school hours are lost each year due to dental-related illness. Most tooth decay is easily preventable and just a few easy steps can help to limit school absences and unnecessary trips to the dentist."

Many new food items at the grocery and convenience stores may be trendy and attractive to your kids but are not good for teeth. Great examples are "gummy" items such as gummy vitamins and gummy snacks for children. Gummy equals sticky, and sticky things that contain sugar and adhere to teeth equals tooth decay! Sugary beverages such as sodas, some sports drinks, "energy" drinks and even fruit juices can be a problem if we are sipping on them all day long. It is important to remember that if you are eating or drinking sugary items and are unable to brush afterward; those sugars are going to be used by bacteria in your mouth to produce acids. These acids then attack your teeth for at least 20 minutes after each sip or bite. So...if you are taking a sip of a sugary drink even twice an hour while at work or at school, your teeth will be under attack most of the day. This leads to tooth decay and poor oral health.

Dr. Terry Frankovich, pediatrician and public health medical director notes that, "Making good food and drink choices can significantly reduce tooth decay. Stay away from snacks that can stick to your teeth, such as gummy snacks, caramel, or sugary candy. Drink water rather than sugary drinks. Water is healthy hydration and can help to rinse away sugars, if you are unable to brush after eating during the day. Chewing sugarless gum after eating, when you are unable to brush, may also be of help." According to the American Dental Association, sugarless gum increases saliva which then washes away food and other debris and neutralizes acids produced by bacteria in the mouth. Increased saliva flow also carries with it more calcium and phosphate to help strengthen tooth enamel. Of course, chewing sugarless gum is not a replacement for daily tooth brushing, flossing, or regular dental checkups. Some schools won't allow children to chew on sugarless gum, but they will allow students to carry water with them throughout the day.

Dentists encourage children as young as one year old to visit the dental office. By doing this, parents establish a “Dental Home” for their child and help their child become familiar with the dental staff.

Below are helpful tooth tips for a healthier smile:

- Brush after meals and before bedtime. If you can only brush once a day, make sure it is before you go to sleep.
- Eat nutritious, well-balance food – avoid sticky and sugary food and drinks.
- Use a soft toothbrush with fluoride toothpaste and floss at least once a day.
- If you don’t have access to a toothbrush during the day, drink plain water and chew on sugarless gum.
- Visit your dentist regularly! Twice a year is best to prevent any problems before they become severe.
- If you take care of your smile, your children will too.

The U.P. Wide Smiles Oral Health Initiative wants all U.P. children to have a healthy, happy smile and good oral health starts at home! For more information, visit the web site at www.mqthealth.org. For local information on the fluoride rinse program contact Rumpf at 779-7234.

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