

## Oral health initiative provides free dental services to students

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

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The Northeast Colorado Health Department has partnered with the Centennial Area Health Education Center to help provide free dental services to local school children.

The Eastern Plains Oral Health Initiative is a school-based oral health education and prevention program involving local school districts, local public health agencies, local registered dental hygienists, Centennial AHEC and other contributing agencies, whose goal is to improve the oral health of uninsured and underinsured children ages three to eight years of age.

In promoting this mission, NCHD began working with the Centennial AHEC in Sept. 2008 under a grant provided by the Caring for Colorado Foundation, to help coordinate dental screenings for children in Phillips and Sedgwick counties. Since that time, the grant has helped to provide free services to 168 children in Phillips County.

Presently, NCHD is working with the Holyoke School District to help coordinate these screenings for children that attend Holyoke Elementary School. The screenings and services are provided free of charge in school during the regular school day so no special transportation is needed. Services include oral health education for children and their parents/guardians, free dental screenings, free fluoride varnishes and free sealants for students with permanent teeth (usually second graders).

“Although the goal of this program focuses on uninsured and underinsured children, these screenings and services are available for every child attending preschool through the second grade at Holyoke Elementary School,” said Michelle Pemberton, NCHD’s preventive health services coordinator. “Even if your child sees or has seen a dentist, the fluoride protection typically lasts three to six months, so it’s a good idea to take advantage of the free service while it’s available.”

The fluoride varnish is used to help protect teeth from cavities and is applied to a child’s teeth using only a few drops with an applicator. The fluoride makes the outside of the teeth harder and helps to prevent decay. The dental sealants are thin plastic coatings that are painted on the top chewing surfaces of the back teeth, or molars. The sealants harden to form a protective shield over the tooth, also helping to prevent tooth decay.

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“All of the services that are offered are painless and do not require drilling,” said Pemberton. “In fact, the children will probably not even be able to tell that anything was done to their teeth, except for having a different taste in their mouth.”

According to Pemberton, the value of a fluoride varnish and four sealants would be \$180 if they were performed in a dentists’ office. The only thing required to receive these free services is a permission slip signed by a parent or guardian. Slips were mailed to parents but can also be obtained from your child’s school.

Holyoke Elementary School has scheduled their dental services for kindergarten through second grade students on Friday, Sept. 25.

For more information concerning the dental screenings or the Eastern Plains Oral Health Initiative, contact Pemberton at 522-3741 ext. 239 or [michellep@nchd.org](mailto:michellep@nchd.org).