February is National Children's Dental Health month, and a great time to remind parents that free dental services are coming to some area schools beginning in March.

The Northeast Colorado Health Department has partnered with Caring for Colorado to help provide free dental services to local school children. The Northeast Oral Health Project is a school-based oral health education and prevention program involving local school districts, local public health agencies, local registered dental hygienists and other contributing agencies, whose goal is to improve the oral health of uninsured and underinsured children in preschool through the second grade.

In promoting this mission, NCHD began working with the Centennial Area Health Education Center in 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 more than 1,100 screenings and fluoride treatments for the children in these two counties.

Under the new contract, the Caring for Colorado Foundation increased the grant award substantially, allowing NCHD to expand the oral health services into Logan and Morgan counties as well. In addition, the Stretesky Foundation out of Sedgwick County is also providing matching funds to assist with the program in that county.

The program includes free oral screenings, fluoride varnish application and sealants for students with permanent teeth (first- and second-graders). All of the children receive education on how to care for their teeth, but only children whose parents return permission forms can receive the fluoride varnish and/or sealants.

The services offer a savings of $31 or more on fluoride and a savings of $38 or more per tooth for the sealants. The screenings and services are provided free of charge in school during the regular school day, so no special transportation is needed.

"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," said Michelle Pemberton, NCHD's health promotion and wellness manager.

"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."

According to Pemberton, parents in Phillips and Sedgwick counties should be receiving permission slips in the mail later this month for clinics during March and April. Clinics for students in Logan and Morgan counties will be held in the fall. The only thing required to receive these free services is a permission slip signed by a parent or guardian, and while the slips are mailed to parents, they can also be obtained from the schools.

Pemberton went on to say that all of the services offered are painless and do not require drilling. 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.

For more information concerning the dental screenings or the Northeast Oral Health Project, contact Kandice Kramer at 970-522-3741, ext. 1247, or email kandicek@nchd.org.

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