

Local Event Highlights Disadvantaged Children's Need for Dental Care

Children from local low-income families will receive free dental services ranging from cleanings to fillings as part of national Give Kids A Smile-day.

All five CHSI clinics will be participating in the event:

Tuesday, February 1 at the Fallbrook Family Health Center

Wednesday, February 9 at the Inland Empire Community Health Center

Thursday, February 10 at the Eastside Family Health Center

Wednesday, February 16 at the Arlanza Family Health Center

Thursday, February 17 at the Moreno Valley Family Health Center

(Please call the clinics to schedule appointments and be sure to mention **Give Kids A Smile Day**)

"It's heartbreaking to see a child's smile destroyed by severe tooth decay," said Dr. Reginald I. Moore, Dental Director of Community Health Systems, Inc. "Imagine not being able to eat, sleep and pay attention in school because you have a mouthful of toothaches," Dr. Moore said. "Some children have reached the point where the only alternative is a mouth full of crowns or pulling the teeth that can't be saved. It's tragic. Our state needs to do more to help children get the dental care they need."

Nearly 1 in 4 children, aged 2 to 11 years, has untreated cavities in their baby teeth, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). While poor diet and oral hygiene certainly play a role, cavities are actually caused by a disease called caries, which is five times more common than asthma.

The National Institutes of Health report that 80 percent of tooth decay is found in just 25 percent of children, primarily from low-income families.

Public health programs such as Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) are supposed to help underserved children, but utilization rates are low.

"Recent statistics show that as many as 60% of children enrolled in Medicaid receive no dental service in throughout the year," Dr. Moore said.

"That number isn't surprising when you learn that our state Medicaid program spends less than one percent on dental services for children and adults."

"Dentists can't do this alone," Dr. Moore said. "With Give Kids A Smile, we can help some children get the dental care they need, but a one-day event will never be enough. Our event is not a cure all, it's a wakeup call. Charity is not a health care system."

"Children's oral health is everyone's business—not just dentists. We need to participate as a community and as a nation. We need to find the political will to solve this problem, Dr. Moore said. "It won't happen overnight. But if enough people start working on it, it will happen."
