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Month focused on children's dental health

Each February, the American Dental Association sponsors National Children's Dental Health Month to raise awareness about the importance of oral health. Smith Dental Clinic observance activities emphasize developing good habits at an early age and scheduling regular dental visits helps children establish the foundation for a lifetime of healthy teeth and gums.

Smith Dental Clinic dentist Dr. (Capt.) Brandon Wolf gave a National Children's Dental Health Month presentation Feb. 6 to morning and afternoon pre-kindergarten students at MacArthur Elementary School. With assistance from dental assistants Spc. Heather Johnston and Spc. Adam Shurtz, Wolf talked to the children about how to keep their teeth healthy.

Colleen Anderson, who is one of the two kindergarten teachers at MacArthur Elementary School, said that the students were very attentive to the presentation and seemed very interested the subject of dental health.

"Having the learning aides to assist with explaining concepts seemed to grab the attention of our students," Anderson said. "The lighted timer integrated into the toothbrush that Dr. Wolf gave each student was a big hit as well."

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Wolf presented students with an illustrated handout that showed various types of foods and asked students which types of foods would be healthiest for teeth. Using an oversized prosthetic model of teeth and gums, he asked for a student volunteer to assist in demonstrating to the other students how to properly brush their teeth using the model.

"Brush the front, back and top of your teeth," Wolf said to the students. "You want to brush your gums and tongue too. Be careful not to brush too hard because that is also not good for dental health."

Wolf said the types of foods children eat and when they eat during the day affects both, their general health and oral health. He spoke about the harmful effects of eating too much sugar and said that residual sugar remaining on teeth provides food for bacteria. And, most bacteria produce acids that can deteriorate the enamel on teeth.

"We use the opportunity of National Children's Dental Health Month to teach the students in our community how to take care of their teeth," Wolf said. "It's important for everyone to understand that brushing your teeth for two minutes is very essential to actually cleaning the teeth. We give away a toothbrush that lights up. It's not only lots of fun, but the light acts as a timer that reminds how long to brush."

National Children's Dental Health Month began as a one-day event in Cleveland, Ohio, Feb. 3, 1941. The American Dental Association had the first national observance of Children's Dental Health Day on Feb. 8, 1949. The single-day observance became a weeklong event in 1955. In 1981, the program was extended to a month-long observance known today as National Children's Dental Health Month.

Wolf said the observance has grown from a two-city event into a nationwide program. National Children's Dental Health Month messages reach thousands of people in communities across the country and at numerous armed services bases.

"Encourage family involvement in dental health by making it fun," Wolf said. "Children's dental health is an important form of family dental readiness. If children are taught proper hygiene techniques and practices early on, those habits are likely to stay with them for the rest of their lives."

Smith Dental Clinic dentists and technicians will visit USD 207 elementary schools throughout February.

Smith Dental Clinic is open 7:30-11:30 a.m. and 12:15-4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Dental exams are by appointment only; there are no walk-in appointments. Units and soldiers can make appointments at Smith Dental Clinic by calling 684-5516 or 684-5001. Dental sick call is 7:30-9 a.m. Monday through Friday.



Dental assistants Spc. Heather Johnston and Spc. Adam Shurtz ask pre-kindergarten students Peyton Wilbanks and Ryan Lanier to show them how teeth should be brushed during a National Children's Dental Health Month visit to their class Feb. 6 at MacArthur Elementary School. Smith Dental Clinic personnel talked to the children about proper brushing techniques "brushing in a circular motion while making sure all teeth surfaces as well as the tongue are brushed" as well as what foods are good and bad for teeth. Photo by Prudence Siebert/Fort Leavenworth Lamp