

Local Event Highlights Disadvantaged Children's Need for Dental Care



Providence – On April 10th an estimated 150 children from low-income families received free dental services ranging from oral health screenings, cleanings, education to sealants as a part of national Give Kids A Smile® day.

Last year, more than 48, 000 dental team members nationwide participated in Give Kids A Smile®, a program first held in 2003 by the American Dental Association (ADA) to provide care and raise awareness of the importance of access to dental care for low-income children.

“It’s heartbreaking to see a child’s smile destroyed by severe tooth decay,” said Dr. Mary McCabe, Dental Director. “Imagine not being able to eat, sleep or pay attention in school because you have a mouthful of toothaches,” Dr. Kim said. “Some children have reached the point where the only alternative is a mouthful of crowns or pulling teeth that can’t be saved. It’s tragic. We are trying to do our part to do more to help children get the dental care they need.”

Nearly 1 in 4 children, ages 2 to 11 years old, have 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 usually caused by a disease called caries, which is five times more common than asthma.

The National Institutes of Health report that 80% of tooth decay is found in just 25% 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.

“Dentists can’t do this alone,” Dr. McCabe 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 wake up call. Charity is not a health care system.”