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### **February Designated as Children's Dental Health Month**

BISMARCK, N.D. - February is designated nationally as Children's Dental Health Month. The month-long health observance brings together dental professionals, health care providers, and educators to promote the benefits of good oral health to children, their caregivers, teachers and many others.

Tooth decay (cavities) is one of the most common chronic conditions of childhood in the United States. Untreated tooth decay can cause pain and infections that may lead to problems with eating, speaking, playing and learning. "Good oral health is a necessity for good overall health," said Toni Hruby, oral health prevention coordinator for the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH). "Parents and caregivers can help children develop good oral health habits early in life to ensure they have a healthy mouth."

A North Dakota survey of third graders in 2018 indicated that 68 percent of children experience tooth decay. One of the goals of the NDDoH Oral Health Program is to encourage everyone to help children maintain good dental health habits so they can be free from pain and live a healthy lifestyle throughout their lifespan. Healthy habits developed in childhood can pay off in adulthood.

A few ways to build a healthy smile include:

- Brush your teeth at least two times a day with fluoridated toothpaste
- Floss your teeth daily
- Eat a balanced diet and limit sugary drinks and snacks
- Avoid tobacco use
- Replace your toothbrush every three to four months and after an illness
- Schedule regular dental check-ups and cleanings
- Talk to your dentist about fluoride varnish and sealants for your child
  - Fluoride varnish is a protective coating that is painted on teeth to help prevent cavities and to help slow or stop cavities that have just started.

- Sealants prevent cavities by creating a barrier between the teeth and cavity-causing bacteria. Sealants also stop cavities from growing and can prevent the need for fillings.

One of the ways the NDDoH Oral Health Program is helping to meet the needs of children statewide is through Seal!ND, a school-based oral health program. This program utilizes public health dental hygienists, private practice dentists and Federally Qualified Health Center's to provide oral health education, dental screenings, dental sealants and fluoride varnish treatments to thousands of at-risk children across the state. "Schools are an ideal place to reach children, teachers and caregivers," said Hruby. "Through these collaborations, we are able to expand the reach of children served across the state."

For more information on the Seal!ND program or preventing tooth decay, visit the NDDoH Oral Health Program website at [oral.health.nd.gov](http://oral.health.nd.gov).

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