

ANDREW J. SPANO, Westchester County Executive
JOSHUA LIPSMAN, M.D., J.D., M.P.H., Commissioner of Health
SUSAN TOLCHIN, Director of Communications

CONTACT: CAREN HALBFINGER

(914) 813-5013

(914) 813-5000 (After Hours)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CHILDREN GET IN-SCHOOL DENTAL CHECK-UPS AND SEALANTS
Yonkers Spectrum School Health program brings the dentist to school

To highlight National Preventive Dental Health Month and promote the importance of preventing serious tooth decay in children's teeth, Dr. Richard Gruffi, the Westchester County Department of Health dentist, gave a lively interactive dental health presentation today to a third-grade class at the Rosemarie Ann Siragusa School in Yonkers. Afterwards, he cleaned and sealed the teeth of some students.

"Bringing dental education and basic dental check-ups to school children who might not otherwise receive these services is such a worthwhile thing to do," said County Executive Andy Spano. "Starting good dental hygiene practices young will help preserve those pearly whites and a routine dental exam can uncover problems that can be treated before they become painful. "

Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease among children. Nearly one-third of black and Hispanic children 2 to 11-years-old have been found to have untreated decay in their baby teeth, as compared to 18 percent of white children in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. Imagine trying to concentrate on learning to read or math problems when you have a raging toothache.

Dr. Gruffi makes a trip to the dentist fun. Throughout the school year, he brings a big set of chompers and an oversized toothbrush to help him teach 1,500 children how to care for their teeth. Dr. Gruffi also examines and cleans the teeth of more than 400 children in four Yonkers schools, including about 180 students at the Rosemarie Ann Siragusa School. These services are offered to children enrolled in the Yonkers Spectrum School Health Program, which is run by St. Joseph's Medical Center in Yonkers. The dental services are funded by a \$50,000 annual state grant and the program is in its eighth year.

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“To avoid tooth decay and establish good habits that can protect their teeth for a lifetime, children should always brush their teeth in the morning and before bedtime, avoid sugary drinks and snacks as much as possible and schedule annual visits with a dentist,” said Health Commissioner Dr. Joshua Lipsman.

The schools that participate in the program are the Rosemarie Ann Siragusa School, Enrico Fermi School for the Performing Arts, Eugenio Maria de Hostos Microsociety School and Martin Luther King, Jr. High Tech and Computer Magnet School, all in Yonkers.

Dr. Gruffi visited the third-graders in Dayle Rowland’s class 3R today. He showed them the right way to brush and what happens when you don’t brush: Mr. Gross Mouth, a model mouth filled with cavities and decay. Dr. Gruffi explained how sealants protect their teeth from getting cavities by filling in deep ridges and grooves in back molars with a thin plastic film and answered questions they had about everything from how to avoid cavities to what causes bad breath (the germs in decaying food particles). He showed them how much sugar – from 13 to 19 teaspoons – is contained in a 20-ounce serving of popular sodas, fruit drinks and iced tea.

“What we want is for all these children to get regular dental care,” said Dr. Gruffi. “We’re here to start the process and do checkups, cleanings and provide dental sealants, a painless procedure to protect permanent molars for children ages six and up.”

“I like going to the dentist. I love the strawberry toothpaste,” said Yashiri Santiago, 7, before she skipped out of the nurse’s office after her dental checkup, with a new toothbrush and four Barbie stickers.

The goal of the preventive dental program is to motivate children and parents to prevent serious tooth decay and to be linked to a dentist for routine primary dental services. The program also seeks to encourage parents to access dental insurance that provides coverage for preventive oral health services. Parents who lack dental coverage for their children can get help to apply for state health insurance programs through Westchester County’s Facilitated Enrollment Program by calling the Health Department at 813-5000.

When further treatment is required, as is often the case when children have untreated dental decay or painful abscesses, referrals for follow-up care are made. Children with insurance but without a dentist are referred to the St. Joseph’s Pediatric Dental Clinic in Yonkers. Families without dental insurance are referred to these neighborhood health centers, where fees are adjusted based on family income:

Mt. Vernon Neighborhood Health Center
107 West 4th Street
Mt. Vernon, NY 10550
(914) 699-7200

Yonkers Community Health Center
30 South Broadway
Yonkers, NY 10701
(914) 968-4898

Greenburgh Neighborhood Health Center
330 Tarrytown Road
Greenburgh, NY 10607
(914) 989-7600

Open Door Family Medical Center
5 Grace Church Street
Port Chester, NY 10573
(914) 939-1175

Ossining Open Door Family Medical Center
165 Main Street
Ossining, NY 10562
(914) 941-4412

Hudson River Community Health Center
1037 Main Street
Peekskill, NY 10566
(914) 739-8105

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