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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**TREASURE YOUR CHILD'S SMILE
February is National Children's Dental Health Month**

Tooth decay is currently the single most common chronic childhood disease. According to a survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly half of U.S. children ages 2 to 9 suffer from untreated tooth decay.

“Imagine not being able to eat, sleep, or pay attention in school because of painful, decayed teeth,” said Joshua Lipsman, M.D., J.D., M.P.H., Commissioner of Health for Westchester County. “The presence of untreated dental disease can also contribute to lifelong health problems.”

Many parents may not realize how important it is to care for their child's primary (baby) teeth. Serious tooth decay can develop by a child's first birthday. Besides acting as natural space maintainers for the permanent teeth, primary teeth are critical for proper chewing, speaking and appearance.

Early Childhood Caries is an infectious disease that can start as soon as an infant's teeth appear. The disease process often starts with the transfer of decay-causing bacteria in saliva from a parent or caregiver to a child on a shared spoon or bottle nipple that has been temperature tested by mouth. That is why it is so important for a parent or caregiver to maintain a cavity-free mouth and avoid sharing utensils with a child or orally testing the temperature of a bottle. Following such practices can lessen the transmission of tooth decay causing germs to the child.

A major contributing factor to Early Childhood Caries is prolonged tooth exposure to milk, formula, fruit juice, or sweetened liquids from a bottle used as a pacifier at bedtime or during naps. These liquids are used by bacteria in the mouth to produce acid that attacks tooth enamel, causing decay.

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“It is not only what children drink, but how often and for how long their teeth are exposed to decay-causing acids,” said Dr. Lipsman. “For example, if you offer a bottle containing a sugary liquid as a pacifier, many times a day, or for an extended time at night, the teeth have a greater chance of decaying” he said.

To help maintain children’s dental health, the Westchester County Health Department offers the following recommendations to parents and caregivers:

- Parents can help prevent tooth decay by not using a bottle as a pacifier or sleep aid unless it contains plain water.
- Pacifiers should not be cleaned by mouth or dipped in sweet liquids.
- Children should be taught to drink from a cup as they approach their first birthday.
- Parents should wipe their baby’s gums with a clean gauze pad after each feeding.
- Brushing with plain water should begin as soon as the baby’s first tooth appears.
- An appointment for the infant’s first oral exam should occur within 6 months of the eruption of the first primary tooth and no later than age 12 months.
- As a child gets older topics of discussion with the family dentist should include proper brushing with a fluoridated toothpaste, flossing, healthy diet and snacks, sealant application and protective mouth guards.

Parents of children who have dental coverage under Medicaid or Child Health Plus are urged to use the services of a dental care provider for their children. The Westchester County Department of Health is ready to assist parents who lack dental coverage for their children by offering facilitated enrollment services. Please call (914) 813-5601 for more information on the Facilitated Enrollment program. In addition, dental services for children are available at the neighborhood health centers listed below:

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 Rd.
Greenburgh, NY 10607
(914) 989-7600

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

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Ossining Open Door
165 Main St.
Ossining, NY 10562
(914) 941-4412

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

Proper care of primary teeth is just as important as care of permanent teeth. With tender care and good maintenance, a child's smile can last a lifetime.

For more information, please call the Westchester County Health Department at (914) 813-5000 or visit the Health Department's website at www.westchestergov.com/health.

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