For Immediate Release

Helping Children Succeed in School

New state law adds dental to hearing and vision screenings for incoming kindergartens, first-graders

Vision and hearing screenings have been part of how families prepare for the big day – their child’s first day of kindergarten – for decades. Children enrolling into their first year of school will now receive an oral health screening, too.

“Dental health is often overlooked when we talk about the health and development of our kids,” says Health Department of Northwest Michigan (HDNW) Health Officer Dan Thorell. “Families need access to care to ensure their children stay healthy and have every advantage education provides.”

A primary way access to dental care is being addressed is through a new state law requiring the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to establish and maintain a program with local health departments, including HDNW. The program, called Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment (KOHA), is expected to serve 112,000 students statewide.

For Local Students
In Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego counties, the program will be led by HDNW school oral health staff, the same staff who has been doing these screenings in schools for years.

“KOHA expands on what HDNW started in 2011 based on local need,” says Dawn Marie Strehl, HDNW Regional Oral Health Coordinator. “The screenings are required; however, parents and guardians may have their regular providers complete a form saying the children have a dental home and have already had the needed exam.”

Tooth decay is the most common chronic childhood disease, five times more common than asthma. In Michigan, almost half of the Head Start children have tooth decay. More than half of the children in Michigan do not see a dentist each year. The goal of this program is to establish a dental home for each child.

HDNW is scheduling screening days during kindergarten round-ups and health fairs in the spring. The dates will be shared by the schools and through HDNW’s social media posts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

The schools will have the forms families need to take to their dental provider to show that the assessment was already done in their office by Registered Dental Hygienist, Dentist, or Dental Therapist. Otherwise, the oral assessment can be done at the school by HDNW’s licensed professionals.

KOHA will receive fundings from the State of Michigan and Delta Dental. For more information on how HDNW will support this new law, please email media@nwhealth.org or call 231-547-7653.

Cutline: HDNW is working with Registered Dental Hygienists to train for and schedule school screenings throughout the region’s 31 counties. The team consists of (from left) Rene Louchart, Caroline Sarya, Angie Sutton, Dawn Marie Strehl, and Valerie Witt. Missing is Kara McLellan. ###