

For Immediate Release

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**SCHOOL-BASED DENTAL CARE COMING TO LOWELL
National Childhood Dental Crisis Addressed Locally**

Lowell, Mass. (May 28, 2007) – In the continued launch of what is envisioned to be a statewide program, the new Oral Health Impact Project (OHIP) is rolling out this month at seven elementary schools in the Lowell Public School District, offering comprehensive, on-site dental care. The program is primarily designed for children who are qualified for Mass Health dental coverage, but is available to all students.

The program is a collaborative effort offered in conjunction with the City of Lowell School Department and will initially be implemented at the following schools: Moody Elementary, Abraham Lincoln, Greenhalge Elementary, S. Christa McAuliffe, Charles W. Morey, Charlotte M. Murkland Elementary, and Varnum Arts. Dr. Thanh-Trang Nguyen is the dentist who will provide service to students in the Lowell Public School District and is also the provider for the New Bedford School District.

More broadly, this new program also provides eligible children with an ongoing “dental home” – a place where they can receive consistent, high-quality dental care. By fall 2007, nearly 70,000 eligible children in Massachusetts will have access to high quality dental care.

The program, which has been available in the New Bedford School District for the last six months, has treated hundreds of school children and performed more than 4,100 vital dental procedures. The children receive comprehensive and consistent dental care in a familiar, child-friendly environment.

Interviews and Visuals: Dr. John Halcovich, President of Oral Health Impact Project will be visiting the Lowell Public Schools throughout May and June and will be available for interviews. Dentists can be observed and photographed performing exams on school children. All interviews and school visits must be arranged in advance.

BACKGROUND

A Silent Epidemic

Recent [news reports](#) demonstrate the tragedy of untreated dental problems among children. Nationwide, an estimated 51 million school hours are lost each year due to dental disease. Overall, tooth decay ranks as the most common childhood disease – five times more common than asthma. Throughout Massachusetts, children in many communities are completely lacking in dental care or receive inconsistent care, due to a variety of factors.

In turning its attention to Massachusetts schools, Oral Health Impact Project is expanding its program, which began in New Bedford, to Middlesex County because of the area's large number of children who are without dental homes, because they are, uninsured or have no access to dentists who accept their Mass Health coverage.

What is Oral Health Impact Project?

Oral Health Impact Project is a national initiative created to bring comprehensive, dental care to lower-income students on a portable basis. More broadly, this new program also provides eligible children with an ongoing “dental home” – a place where they can receive consistent, high-quality care.

“In Lowell, Oral Health Impact Project is literally bringing the dentist's office into the school, complete with state-of-the-art equipment and professionally trained staff,” said Dr. John Halcovich, President of Oral Health Impact Project. “We've found that students are far more comfortable being treated in the school environment than in a traditional clinical setting, because in school they have the support of their teachers and schoolmates, and the benefit of familiar surroundings.”

Among the many other advantages of this school-based program is that parents and guardians aren't required to take time off from work for their children's dental appointments, transportation costs and logistics are mitigated, and students lose appreciably less classroom time. In addition, Oral Health Impact Project provides parents and guardians with a full report on their child's oral health condition, including a record of services received. Dental referrals will also be recommended where appropriate.

Staggering Statistics

“The dental statistics among our children are as appalling as they are staggering,” Dr. Halcovich said. “Sixty-five percent of third graders in our target population have a history of tooth decay; forty percent have untreated tooth decay; and only twelve percent of the state’s dentists accept Mass Health dental insurance, even though more than 500,000 children have a Mass Health card providing for dental treatment.

Larry Caplin, DMD, CEO of Oral Health Impact Project, added that, “Oral Health Impact Project is designed to help vastly improve the quality of dental care received by students in Middlesex County and elsewhere in the state. Our goal is to create a sustainable program in Massachusetts that, in five years, will increase eligible children’s access to dental care by fifty percent.”

Looking Ahead

In the coming months, Oral Health Impact Project will also implement its program in other Massachusetts communities. Over the next five years, plans are to launch Oral Health Impact Project nationally, focusing on those states with the greatest need.

In addition to the program’s primary goal of enhancing student access to quality dental care, Dr. Caplin also envisions a secondary goal: helping recruit the next generation of dental professionals. “There is a dental crisis in this state that is two-fold,” he explained. “Certainly, there are far too many children who are uninsured or, and who as a result receive inadequate dental care. But, at the same time that the need for quality dentistry is increasing, the number of practicing dentists is decreasing. On a net basis, the country is losing nearly 2,000 dental providers a year.

“Through Oral Health Impact Project and other efforts, we’re hoping to demonstrate exactly how rewarding a dental career can be – not simply financially, but from the perspective of contributing something truly meaningful to the community.”

For more information, go to www.ohip.us.

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