



Harris County Hospital District

NEWS RELEASE

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Trick or Treatment?

Pediatric clinic provides fluoride treatments to toddlers, educates families on dental care

HOUSTON (Oct. 23, 2006) – Patients at El Jardin pediatric clinic at Ben Taub General Hospital are getting an unexpected treat this Halloween, and it's not candy. It's fluoride! As part of Project Smile, a new program aimed at the early prevention of oral disease, El Jardin has begun providing fluoride treatments to toddlers during routine well-child exams.

“Cavities and other forms of dental disease are preventable, but this is something parents should start thinking about as soon as a child gets his or her first tooth. Bottle feeding and sugary juices can all lead to tooth decay,” said Dr. Shea Palamountain, director of El Jardin. “If you don't take care of baby teeth it can cause serious problems with permanent teeth once they come in.”

Palamountain, Dr. Mary Rocha, a fellow pediatrician, and El Jardin nurses now apply a fluoride varnish to patients who are there for their 12-, 18-, 24- and 36-month check-ups. The treatment involves drying a child's teeth and applying a fluoride solution to the tooth's surface with a brush. It only takes a few seconds, but the benefits last much longer.

Fluoride strengthens tooth enamel and makes teeth more resistant to decay. It also inhibits the growth of bacteria, which contributes to plaque and cavity formation. Ideally, fluoride treatments should be applied every six months for continued protection.

Due to poor diets and inadequate oral health care, dental cavities primarily affect minority and low-income children. Applying the fluoride treatments in a primary care setting allows the staff to treat at-risk children before they develop serious dental problems down the line. The program, which is funded by a Harris County Hospital District Foundation grant and is therefore available to patients at no extra charge, also educates parents about how dental disease is preventable, said Palamountain.

“When parents learn about the fluoride treatment their child is going to receive, it starts a dialogue and gives us an opportunity to educate them about dental hygiene,” Palamountain said. “Parents who are better educated make an effort to improve their family's habits at home, where prevention should start.”

The Harris County Hospital District is the public health care system for the nation's third most-populous county. It provides more than 1.1 million health care visits each year to uninsured and underinsured residents of Harris County. The hospital district operates Ben Taub General Hospital, Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital, Quentin Mease Community Hospital, and an extensive network of community-based clinics, health centers, and mobile health units.

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