An Early Intervention Approach to Early Childhood Caries Prevention: Dental-WIC Collaboration

Organization:
Providence Community Health Center, Providence, RI

Summary:
The Providence Community Health Center dental site serves pregnant women and children ages 2-19. As many of our patients already have advanced caries and rampant decay at age 2, a pilot project was undertaken to prevent Early Childhood Caries through early intervention at the WIC appointment.

Although the Community Health Center network has several separate WIC sites throughout the city of Providence, the site chosen for the program was based on space availability within the dental staff schedule. All WIC sites are encouraged to make dental appointments for their clients at the WIC appointment. The onsite WIC can not only make appointments, but physically bring their clients to the dental staff on the day they are located in the building. Visits are covered by insurance as Rhode Island has dental coverage for children ineligible for Medicaid services.

The focus of the visit (approximately 20 minutes) is on prevention and education. Clinical issues addressed at the exam include: eruption sequence, use of the pacifier, thumb-sucking, nutrition and the importance of pediatric dental care. If teeth are present, fluoride varnish is applied. The most common problem encountered is the use of cariogenic liquids in the bottle (i.e. Gatorade, Crystal Light lemonade and punch). Parents are given tools (brushes and information packets), demonstrations and positive reinforcement when they perform proper infant oral care.

Lessons Learned:
When the program was first introduced, there was a high level of interest among the various WIC sites and appointments were heavily scheduled. After the initial excitement, interest among the sites other than the location site began to wane. In order to reinforce the value of this program and to maintain interest in the program, the dentist is personally visiting all WIC referral sites. The WIC Director also included a dental referral as a mandatory part of the WIC appointment.
Contact Person for Inquiries:
Mary McCabe, DDS, MBA
Dental Director
Providence Community Dental Center
557 Broad St.
Providence, RI 02907
mmccabe@providencechc.org