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# <u>For Immediate Release</u>

## *About 40 children brave the weather for MCHD Dentistry's Give Kids a Smile!*

**MORGANTOWN, WV (Feb. 4, 2022)** — If it's the first Friday in February and snowing (or sleeting or both), it must be Give Kids a Smile! at Monongalia County Health Department.

However, the bad weather did not deter parents from bringing their children to MCHD Dentistry, the health department's full service dental office, for free checkups and cleanings. In all, about 40 children without dental insurance were seen as part of this year's Give Kids a Smile! event, and there was only one cancellation due to the snowy and icy conditions outside.

"Three kids for free, I was not missing this," said Rose Wilson of Morgantown, who brought in her children, including Kash, 2.

Luckily, she noted, the roads weren't treacherous when she drove in.

Wilson learned about Give Kids a Smile! recently when she made an appointment for herself. "It's a great program for the community," she said.

As Kash played with a balloon and waited to sit in the dental chair for his first checkup, Wilson was optimistic that the visit would go well. The family had watched the cartoon "Bubble Guppies" on the way over in a segment where the characters were brushing their teeth.

"He likes to brush his teeth at home so hopefully it will be a good visit," Wilson added.

MCHD Dentistry has been participating in Give Kids a Smile!, since 2011. Held during National Children's Dental Health Month, as designated by the American Dental Association,

the event provides the opportunity for kids 18 and under who don't have dental insurance to get cleanings and checkups.

For the past few years, the weather for Give Kids a Smile! has been snowy, which sometimes has impacted attendance but also has led to a new goal of providing restorative work when possible. By lunchtime on Friday, Dr. Youseph Kassar, MCHD Dentistry's interim program manager, had filled two cavities and performed an extraction.

"Prevention is key and is our main focus," Dr. Kassar said. "However, we have left room in the schedule for some restorative work as needed."

According to information on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website, cdc.gov, "Untreated cavities can cause pain and infections and can lead to problems eating, speaking and learning. More than 1 in 5 children aged 2 to 5 years has at least one cavity in their baby teeth."

Established by the ADA in 2003, Give Kids a Smile encourages dentists to hold events around the country. Each year approximately 6,500 dentists and 30,000 dental team members volunteer at local GKAS events to provide free oral health education, screenings and preventive and restorative treatment to more than 300,000 children, according to information on the ADA's website.

Dr. Kassar notes that MCHD Dentistry's staff goes out of their way to make it a fun and festive day for children. The office is decorated with colorful helium balloons tethered by tubes of toothpaste for children to take home.

In addition to the checkup and cleanings, children also learn about good oral health. "It's important to raise awareness of the importance of oral health not only during this month but throughout the year," Dr. Kassar said.

Also, having positive first dental visits goes a long way toward setting up a child to keep up good dental habits and visit the dentist regularly.

"We were trying to find a dentist that's good with kids and we heard about MCHD Dentistry," said Malia Neville, who brought in her three children: River, 9, Raelin, 4 and Ridge, 2. "We love it."

With MCHD Dentistry's 12th Give Kids a Smile! event nearly in the books, Dr. Kassar was happy that the weather didn't impact the event much.

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"It's always a great day, with a lot of appreciation expressed to the staff," he said.

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