

More Jackson County students will have access to dental care next year from Center For Family Health mobile dental unit

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About 1,000 more Jackson County students will have easy access to preventive dental health care because of a Healthy Smiles, Healthy Children grant received by the Center For Family Health. File Photo

JACKSON, MI – A grant will allow the Center for Family Health to expand its mobile dental services to more Jackson County students next year. The Healthy Smiles, Healthy Children grant will provide up to \$20,000. It will allow the center's mobile dental unit to visit more buildings in the Western and Michigan Center school districts, as well as add two new districts to the program in the 2013-14 school year, said Molly Kaser, Center For Family Health CEO. "We are very excited," Kaser said. "This will give us more contact with more children in Jackson County."

The mobile dental unit currently visits children at Michigan Center, Western, Jackson Public, Columbia, Northwest and Vandercook Lake schools, as well as the Community Action Agency Head Start program and the ABC Academy preschools on Lansing and Lawrence avenues.

As of March 31, more than 1,200 students have been served this school year, according to a press release. Approximately 1,000 more Jackson County students could be served next year because of the grant, it said. "Many of the students we see have never seen a dentist," Shari Hardcastle, the center's dental office manager, said in the release. The school-based visits eliminate transportation and schedule conflicts, and students can participate after parents fill out permission slips, Kaser said. The mobile program accepts Medicaid and other insurance, but no family is turned away because of inability to pay, she said.

The mobile unit's dentist, hygienist and dental assistants provide dental exams, X-rays, cleanings, fluoride treatments and sealants to students. Parents also receive education regarding the importance of children's dental care. The grant will allow the center to encourage greater participation among families in the participating districts, the release said. Hygienists will visit the schools about a week before the mobile unit arrives to distribute toothbrushes and toothpaste to students and educational materials for parents, it said.

All mobile dental patients also have access to services at the center's main facility at 505 N. Jackson St. Services also are available at the Northeast Health Center at Northeast Elementary School, 1024 Fleming St. "Improving children's oral health improves their physical health," Hardcastle said in the release. "We are thrilled to play a role in making our community's children healthier."

For more information, call the center at 748-5500 or visit its website.