

Spotlight On: Chopper Topper

For more than 10 years Chopper Topper, a program partnership between Kids in Need of Dentistry (KIND) and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Oral Health Program, annually has been providing hundreds of low income school children in the Denver metropolitan area with access to quality health care.

Chopper Topper, the first program of its kind in Denver, provides dental screenings and preventive molar sealants on site to second grade students who have limited access to dental care because of economic and cultural barriers. It works with elementary schools with a student population rate of 60 percent or more enrolled in the free or reduced-rate lunch program.

Since 2003, Chopper Topper has placed 21,751 sealants on children's teeth. Beginning as a pilot program at Cheltenham Elementary School in West Denver, the number of schools that have benefited from the program has almost tripled, beginning with 23 schools in 1998-99 and growing to 60 schools in the most recent academic school year.

Services of the Chopper Topper portable dental unit include dental health screenings, sealants to help prevent tooth decay, oral health information for parents and appropriate referrals for children who need restorative or emergency care. Second graders are targeted because at that age most of the first molars are newly erupted but have not had time to decay.

In order to increase the number of children who could receive care through Chopper Topper, KIND now employs one full-time and one part-time dental hygienist. The part-time hygienist was added after the Delta Dental Foundation, which had originally awarded the program a three-year grant, renewed its support for another three years. The success of the program also is due to the support of volunteer local dentists, dental hygienists and dental assistants. Dental hygiene students annually rotate through the program as well.

During the 2008-2009 school year, Chopper Topper visited schools in eight Denver Metro school districts. Three schools – Annunciation, Bryant-Webster and Valdez Elementary Schools – had 100 percent participation of the second graders in Chopper Topper. A combined total of 118 students were seen and 237 sealants were placed.

Genevieve Valdez, RDH, serves as overall coordinator of the program. She can be reached at gvaldez@kindsmiles.org or by calling 303-733-3710 or toll-free 877-544-KIND. For more information about the Chopper Topper program, visit the KIND website at www.kindsmiles.org.