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## **Annual ADA awareness day coming Feb. 1**

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FAIRFIELD COUNTY -- Most parents would agree nothing warms their hearts more than seeing their child smile.

However, according to the Ohio Department of Health, approximately one in four children have tooth decay or untreated cavities, making some kids too embarrassed to smile.

But local dentists and dental hygienists are trying to reverse that trend by volunteering their services on Feb. 1 as part of the sixth annual "Give Kids A Smile Day."

The event is a national initiative sponsored by the American Dental Association to raise awareness about untreated oral disease and disparities in dental care among disadvantaged children.

"We know that teeth are important for more than (having) good looks," said Linda Hewetson, a registered dental hygienist in Lancaster, who has participated in the program since 2004.

Poor oral health can adversely impact a child's ability to speak and eat, his or her overall health and self-esteem and performance in school.

That is why it is important children have access to dental care, Hewetson said.

But many do not.

ODH reports that dental care is the No. 1 health care need among children and low-income adults. About 23 percent of children and 43 percent of adults in Ohio do not have dental insurance.

That is why Jenny Ruff, community resource coordinator for Fairfield County Job & Family Services, said she applauds professionals like Hewetson and her employers, general dentists Glenn Burns and Jennifer Lape, for donating their time to "Give Kids A Smile Day."

"It's a really good program and a wonderful opportunity for parents who do not have dental insurance or the money to pay for those services to get their children the care they need," Ruff said.

Appointments are still available through JFS, but "the sooner (parents) call, the better," she added.

In 2007, volunteers provided free dental services to 18 children in Fairfield County.