



NORTHWEST COLORADO  
**HEALTH**



## Frequently Asked Questions About School-Based Health Centers and the Mobile Dental Clinic

### **What is a school-based health center (SBHC)?**

SBHCs are health care facilities located inside a school or on school grounds. Often operated as a partnership between the school district and a community health organization, SBHCs offer varying services based on community needs and resources. As of January 2021, Colorado is home to 69 SBHCs, many of which are operated by Federally Qualified Community Health Centers (like Northwest Colorado Health). The Mobile Dental Clinic will be the first SBHC in Northwest Colorado addressing a critical need in the community.

### **What are the benefits of a school-based health center (SBHC)?**

SBHCs help children to stay healthy and in school by placing critically needed services directly in schools so all children have access to dental and medical care. Parents benefit because they do not have to take time off work. Schools and children benefit because students miss less classroom time. SBHC services are provided to all students, regardless of insurance type or ability to pay. Research shows that students who use SBHCs are less likely to be absent or tardy and more likely to graduate or be promoted than a nonuser.

### **What age groups will the Mobile Dental Clinic serve?**

The mobile dental clinic will initially serve school-aged children in the Hayden and Steamboat Springs school districts with the vision of expanding services to families, school district staff and other members of the community. The mobile dental clinic will be located on the school campus with the potential to expand collaboration with community organizations such as Integrated Community and the Boys & Girls Club of Northwest Colorado.

### **Why do we need a mobile dental clinic?**

After many discussions with local superintendents and assessing regional health access data, we affirmed that there is an unmet need for dental services for children in our area.

- Oral health is essential to overall health. A growing body of evidence has linked oral health, particularly gum disease, to several chronic diseases, including diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. These conditions may be prevented in part with regular visits to the dentist.
- The most common chronic disease in young children is dental caries, or tooth decay.
- According to the 2019 Colorado Health Access Survey (CHAS): Young children enrolled in Medicaid are less likely to see a dental professional. These needs are exacerbated in our rural areas. In our region, 24% of students reported problems with their mouth or teeth in the past year (YRBS 2019). A higher percent of these students in our region, compared to the state, had difficulty eating (33%), as well as trouble sleeping (19%) due to oral health issues.
- According to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) Children's Oral Health Screening data, Students at the lowest Socioeconomic Status (SES) schools had about twice the prevalence of untreated decay: 21.9% of kindergarten and 17.7% of third grade students compared with 13.6% of kindergarten and 8.1% of third grade students at the highest SES schools.

**Does the mobile dental clinic interfere with parental authority?**

No. The parent or legal guardian must sign a consent form before their minor child may receive services in the mobile clinic. All state laws will be followed allowing students to receive confidential services accordingly. The overarching approach to this initiative is that the provider, parents, and child work together to resolve health problems promoting strong family communication.

**Will the mobile dental clinic take money away from classrooms?**

No. SBHCs, including the mobile dental clinic, get their funding from many different sources. Schools generally provide only in-kind support to their school-based health centers, such as space and utilities. School districts recognize that student achievement gaps can be closed if all students are physically and mentally healthy.

**Will the mobile dental clinic take patients away from local providers?**

No. The dental providers in the mobile clinic will collaborate with and make referrals to community providers. This initiative provides another entry point into the community's oral health care system for children who may not otherwise be able or willing to seek help outside the school.

**Why are the School Districts partnering with Northwest Colorado Health to provide dental services?**

Northwest Colorado Health, the safety net clinic for our region, provides medical, behavioral and dental services in Northwest Colorado to anyone in need regardless of their ability to pay. The mobile dental clinic will be part of Northwest Colorado Health's Federally Qualified Community Health Center Program and will be provided through a mobile unit or mobile equipment. Northwest Colorado Health employs medical, dental, and behavioral health care providers, all who are licensed and approved to provide services in a school-based setting. Their mission is to improve quality of life for all Northwest Colorado residents by providing comprehensive health resources and creating an environment that supports community wellness.

**What dental services will be offered?**

Dental services initially offered will include the following with the option to expand services as the program matures: medical history review, screenings and/or exams, radiographs/x-rays, dental charting, fluoride treatments, dental cleanings, referrals to community dentists and oral hygiene instruction and nutritional counseling.

**When and where will dental services be offered?**

A soft-launch of the program will take place in December, 2021 with the program being fully in place by early 2022. Dental services will be offered via a mobile unit or mobile equipment on the school grounds. To determine where the greatest and most urgent needs are, Hayden and Steamboat Springs school districts will be distributing a needs assessment survey of school-aged children in participating schools. Parents, teachers and staff will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire to guide the roll out of the mobile dental clinic identifying which schools and which populations have the most need. The longer-term vision is to serve multiple schools and other locations in the region potentially adding medical and behavioral health care services.

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