Oklahoma HMO shares tips to help seniors with their oral health
Approximately 20% of seniors over age 65 have no remaining teeth

OKLAHOMA – According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about two in three adults 65 or older have gum disease, and 20% have lost all of their teeth. Because many seniors are disabled, homebound or live in a nursing home, they are at an increased risk of poor oral health. With those 65 or older expected to represent 24% of the overall population by 2060, GlobalHealth, an Oklahoma-based health insurance provider, is sharing information to educate Oklahomans on the importance of oral health, and how the health of teeth, the mouth and surrounding structures is central to a person's overall health and well-being.

"Oral health is important for seniors to be able to chew, speak and smile properly, and poor oral hygiene has been linked to tooth decay, gum disease and oral cancer," said Dr. Wesley Williams, medical director at GlobalHealth. "Your risk for these diseases and tooth loss increases with age, so it is important to ensure you are taking the proper precautions as you get older."

GlobalHealth is providing information to help Oklahoma seniors practice good oral hygiene.

What is oral health? Oral health encompasses the well-being of everything inside of your mouth. According to the American Dental Association, almost 100 million Americans do not visit the dentist each year, despite the fact that routine dental visits and practicing good oral hygiene can prevent many diseases. Additionally, conditions that affect the entire body often show symptoms in the mouth first, so it is important to be aware of your oral health.

Signs and symptoms. If you experience ulcers or sores that will not heal after two weeks, you should see your dentist immediately, as this may be a sign you have developed an oral health condition. Toothaches, jaw-clicking, pain when chewing or biting, chronic bad breath, bleeding or swollen gums after brushing or flossing are a few more symptoms to note. The earlier you can catch an oral condition, the higher your chances are to maintain your oral health.

Oral health conditions. Tooth decay, gum disease and oral cancer are a few of the most common conditions associated with oral hygiene. Tooth decay occurs when your tooth enamel

gets broken down and, if left untreated, can lead to tooth loss. Gum disease develops if the gums have become infected, and if it's left alone, tooth support weakens, possibly leading to the need for removal. Oral cancer has a high mortality rate due to late discovery, and it's more common in older adults who smoke or are heavy drinkers. It's important to schedule routine dental screenings to decrease your chances of developing an oral health condition.

Tips for good oral health. There are many ways you can practice good oral hygiene, such as flossing once a day and brushing your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. Remember to also change your toothbrush every 3-4 months and consider limiting alcoholic drinks and staying away from tobacco products. It's also important to check if any of your medications cause dry mouth, as this condition could lead to a fissured tongue, cracked lips or mouth sores.

Before scheduling your next appointment at the dentist, keep in mind your healthcare provider may offer dental benefits. For example, GlobalHealth offers on some of its Medicare Advantage plans preventive dental services, including cleaning, dental X-rays and oral exams with no co-pays or deductibles. Additionally, GlobalHealth Medicare Advantage members may qualify for non-preventive services, such as diagnostic services, extractions and dentures.

About GlobalHealth
GlobalHealth is changing health insurance in Oklahoma. As an industry leader, GlobalHealth is an Oklahoma-based health maintenance organization covering individuals in all 77 Oklahoma counties. Working proactively with its members, GlobalHealth engages a personalized management plan to address their specific needs and ensure the best possible health outcomes. GlobalHealth utilizes cutting-edge, predictive data technology as a foundation to deliver improved healthcare as part of its commitment to making health insurance more affordable. Its membership includes state, education and municipal employees, federal employees, and individuals who are eligible for Medicare. To learn more, visit www.GlobalHealth.com.

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