



School-based Sealant Programs offer a Preventive Punch

It's common knowledge how effective community water fluoridation and other fluoride products like toothpastes, gels, varnish, and supplements have been in lowering the rate of tooth decay and tooth loss among children and adults in the U.S. over the last half-century. Did you know, however, that approximately 80 percent of tooth decay is found in only 25 percent of children, disproportionately in children from low-income families?¹ In addition, 90 percent of the new decay in children's teeth is on the chewing surfaces of the back teeth where fluoride works less effectively.² This is where dental sealants are best utilized.

National surveys by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicate that only 38 percent of children and teenagers 12 to 19 have dental sealants. This number is much lower in children from low-income families and certain races/ethnicities that have higher tooth decay rates and would most benefit from sealants.¹

A sealant is virtually 100 percent effective if fully retained on the tooth. Various studies have shown sealants to remain intact 92 to 96 percent of the time after one year and 67 to 82 percent after five years. Sealants should be checked at each regular dental appointment and can be reapplied if they are no longer in place. Even for those sealants that fully or partially fall out, the children are no worse off than if they never had received a sealant.³

Delivering sealants through school-based sealant programs that target schools where a high percentage of schoolchildren

participate in free and reduced-price lunch programs has proven to be effective in getting sealants to lower-income children. School-based dental sealant delivery programs provide sealants to children unlikely to receive them otherwise. Sealants delivered through school-based programs have been shown to decrease tooth decay by 60 to 65 percent.⁴ Such programs can also be cost effective as they verify unmet need for sealants; often receive financial, material, and policy support; and don't require the children to go outside their normal environment for care.

The Northeast Delta Dental Foundation provides grants to support school-based oral health programs in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont that provides sealants and other preventive services to underserved children.

References

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