

Dental Sealants



“...effective in the primary prevention of tooth decay.”¹



Dental Sealants: A Fact Sheet

What is the problem?

Tooth decay, although preventable, is a chronic disease affecting children’s ability to concentrate and learn, as well as their speech development, eating habits, activity levels and self-esteem. In fact, it is the most common chronic disease of childhood.² Nationally, dental decay is five times more common than childhood asthma and seven times more common than hayfever.⁴ Tooth decay, left untreated, can cause pain and tooth loss.

- 17% of children aged 2-4 years have already had decay.
- By the age of 8, approximately 52% of children have experienced decay,
- By the age of 17, dental decay affects 78% of children

An estimated 7.8 million hours of school are lost annually in Colorado due to acute oral pain and infection⁴

What about dental sealants?

Dental sealants, a thin coating bonded into the pit and fissures of the chewing surface of permanent molars, are nearly 100 percent effective in preventing tooth decay.² When properly placed and retained, dental sealants are a highly effective primary preventive measure.⁴ Sealants prevent tooth decay by creating a barrier between the teeth and decay-causing bacteria. Sealants also stop cavities from growing and can prevent the need for expensive fillings. Sealants are 100 percent effective if they are fully retained on the tooth.² According to the Surgeon General’s 2000 report on oral health, sealants have been shown to reduce decay by more than 70 percent.¹

Why are school-based dental sealant programs recommended?

In 2002, the Task Force on Community Preventive Services, a national independent, nonfederal, multidisciplinary task force appointed by the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), strongly recommended school sealant programs as an effective strategy to prevent tooth decay.³ CDC further estimates that if 50 percent of children at high risk participated in school sealant programs, over half of their tooth decay would be prevented and money would be saved on their treatment costs.⁵

Healthy People 2010 Objective:

Increase the proportion of children who have received dental sealants on their molar teeth.⁶

Colorado's numbers

Colorado's Basic Screening Survey in 2004 found: ⁴

- 35 percent of Colorado's third graders had sealants on their first molars.
- 57 percent of Colorado's third graders had experienced tooth decay.
- 26 percent of Colorado's third graders had untreated dental decay

The percentage of Colorado children with untreated decay is unevenly distributed in the state, with the greatest unmet needs in areas of the state with the high percentage of low-income populations. ⁷

What is Colorado doing?

The Oral Health Program supports school-based sealant projects, which are designed to identify second grade children who will benefit from the placement of pit and fissure sealants on permanent molar teeth, with parental consent. The project includes:

- A dental screening by a dentist or registered dental hygienist
- Sealant placement
- Classroom presentations on oral hygiene and sealants
- Presentations on oral health for parents
- Referrals for children who need restorative or emergency care

Programs providing sealants:

- KIND – Kids in Need of Dentistry
- Rocky Mountain Youth – Ronald McDonald Care Mobile Denver Health
- Summit County School District
- Sterling RE-1 School District
- Greeley/Evans School District 6

Strategies for Colorado's future

- Continue to promote and fund school-based dental sealants and expand the programs statewide.
- Promote the school-based sealant guidelines and cost benefits of school-based sealant programs.

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