

## **SEALANTS TO PREVENT DENTAL DECAY FOR THE BENEFIT OF PENNSYLVANIA CHILDREN**

*Effective procedure helps state come closer to reaching a national health objective*

### **Public Health Problem**

- Dental decay is the most common childhood chronic disease with the greatest impact on low-income families.
- Over fifty million school hours per year are lost because of dental-related illness, according to estimates.
- Preventing decay by sealing permanent molars, the most important of chewing teeth, is cost effective and provides a lifetime of benefits.
- In Pennsylvania, one fourth of children age eight and age fourteen have a tooth with a sealant, a proportion below the Healthy People 2010 national goal of fifty percent.

### **Program**

- The Pennsylvania Department of Health uses Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant funding to implement a Dental Sealant Grant Program that reaches children in schools with more than fifty percent participation in Free and Reduced Cost School Meal Program.
- Program funding supports four county and municipal health departments to develop and sustain dental sealant programs.
- Participation in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Sealant Efficiency Assessment for Locals and States program, which helps states evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of their dental sealant programs, is required.
- These programs also teach children preventive care for teeth and gums, provide referrals to providers, and help establish dental homes.

### **Impact**

- The Pennsylvania Department of Health projects that over 4,500 children will benefit from having sealants placed as a result of the first two rounds of grant funding. A third funding round is in the planning stage.
- Sealants can improve children's quality of life, reduce school absences due to dental problems, and lessen the need for future treatment. Programs such as these also provide an opportunity to discover other types of oral disease and refer children for needed treatment.

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