School Dental Sealant Programs

Dental Sealants

Dental sealants prevent 80% of cavities in the back teeth, where 9 in 10 cavities occur.

Low-income children are 20% less likely to get dental sealants than higher-income children.

Children from low-income families without sealants have about 60% more cavities in their first adult molars than children from higher-income families.


Louisiana Seals Smiles

Schools are an ideal place to reach children - they play a pivotal role in impacting a child’s health. School-based dental sealant programs are an evidence-based best practice approach for preventing tooth decay among children, especially lower-income children.

Louisiana Seals Smiles was an oral health program operated by the Louisiana Department of Health between 2012 and 2015. It targeted 1st, 2nd and 6th grade children in Louisiana. Third grade children also participated. It provided dental sealants and fluoride varnish to eligible children throughout the state free of charge while at school.

A total of 7,824 children were screened and 4,283 received dental sealants in over fifteen parishes!

Throughout the country, programs like these increased the number of low-income children receiving sealants by about 70% from 2004 to 2014.

1999-2004
23% of low-income children had sealants.

2012-2014
39% of low-income children had sealants.

This increase has prevented almost ONE MILLION CAVITIES!

**Recommendations for Action**

### Dental Practice Act

The current Dental Practice Act requires a full dental exam by a dentist prior to a dental hygienist applying sealants in a school setting.

- Along with 15 other states, the 2015 PEW Report evaluated Louisiana’s efforts to prevent tooth decay by improving sealant access for low-income children with a grade of a **D**.

- Also according to the Report, **Louisiana is 1 of only 11** states that a full dental exam is always required in a school setting before a hygienist can assess and apply needed sealants.

### Recommended Amendment

Allow for dental hygienists to assess the need for sealants, as well as apply sealants, in a school setting only, without a full dental exam.

**>>** Applying sealants are the most cost-effective way to prevent tooth decay in low-income children.

**>>** Specifically in low-income, rural areas of Louisiana, schools are the ideal place to impact and improve a child’s oral health. There are instances where the nearest dental office is 50 miles from the school.

**>>** It is difficult to get buy-in from working dentists to participate in the Louisiana Seals Smiles Program. Obstacles include:
- **Volunteer.** This is a volunteer program. Dentists do not get paid for their services.
- **Travel.** Our highest-need areas are rural parts of Louisiana. Most dentists prefer to work from their own offices.
- **Cancellations.** After committing to a specific date, dentists often cancel at the last minute.

Please help us to continue to move our children’s oral health forward!
Help us amend the Dental Practice Act!

Special thanks to several of our key providers involved in the Louisiana Seals Smiles Program: the Louisiana State University School of Dentistry, The Health Enrichment Network, Health Centers in Schools, University of Louisiana at Monroe, Primary Care Providers of East Feliciana, and Dental Caravan, Inc.