



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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With Halloween Candy, Time is Not On Your Side

When trick-or-treaters demand, “gimme something good to eat,” they’re hoping for candy—and lots of it. It’s certainly part of the holiday’s appeal, but a tradition that causes concern about the effects of sugar on children’s teeth. With a few simple strategies and common sense, however, parents can help protect their kids’ teeth from the onslaught of sugar.

“The quantity of candy kids eat is certainly something to monitor, but just as important is limiting the amount of time sugar comes in contact with teeth,” said Max Anderson, DDS, a national oral health advisor for Delta Dental Plans Association.

Candy choice plays a role in this strategy. Hard or chewy candies, including suckers, caramels, popcorn balls, and gum, are often the worst offenders since they can bathe teeth in sugar for long periods of time. Some of these candies can also cause additional problems or damage for people wearing braces and other oral appliances. Better choices include small candy bars and other candies that can be consumed more quickly and easily.

Grazing on candy can also increase the exposure teeth have to sugar. Grabbing a piece every now and then from a trick-or-treat bag over the course of a few hours, for example, from

after school until dinnertime, brings teeth in contact with sugar over longer, drawn-out periods of time. Munching on a few small pieces in one sitting followed by a glass of water or a thorough tooth brushing is a better option for limiting this exposure.

Oral health experts long ago identified sugar as one of the major culprits behind tooth decay. If not removed by brushing or some other means, naturally occurring bacteria in the human mouth form a colorless, sticky film called plaque. Cavity-causing organisms within plaque feed on sugar and turn it into acid. This acid attacks tooth enamel and causes tooth decay.

“With each American consuming an average of 26 pounds of candy annually, these strategies can be applied year-round. Let your children enjoy some candy, then go back to eating a healthy diet,” said Dr. Anderson. “Encouraging good oral health habits throughout the year, including brushing at least twice a day, flossing, and visiting your dentist regularly, will promote good oral health habits for a lifetime. That’s the best way to make sure that a little extra fun at Halloween won’t be a setback for your children’s oral health.”