



An Oral Health Prevention Program of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health

What is the public health issue?

Although preventable, tooth decay is a chronic disease affecting all age groups. In fact, it is the most common chronic disease of childhood. Untreated tooth decay is associated with difficulty in eating, communicating and with lower self-esteem. Dental disease affects a child's ability to concentrate in school and their ability to learn. Adverse consequences of dental disease, including tooth decay, are far worse for those who have limited or no access to dental services.

What is the impact of an oral health prevention program?

The primary purpose of an oral health prevention program is to prevent tooth decay (cavities) using dental sealants and fluoride. Dental sealants are a plastic material placed on the chewing surfaces of back teeth (molars), and cover up to 90 percent of the places where decay occurs in children's teeth. Sealants also stop cavities from growing and can prevent the need for expensive fillings. Fluoride varnish is a topical fluoride that is "painted" on teeth and prevents tooth decay by about 30 percent. The combination of sealants and fluoride has the potential to nearly eliminate tooth decay in school age children. Sealants are most cost-effective when provided to children who are at highest risk for tooth decay. Oral health prevention programs are an effective strategy to prevent tooth decay.



What is the MDPH-SEAL Program?

Using portable dental equipment, dental hygienists employed by the Department of Public Health provide oral health screenings, oral health education, dental sealants and fluoride, and referrals for follow-up dental care. Since its inception in 2008, the goal of the MDPH-SEAL Program has been to prevent tooth decay and promote continuous and comprehensive dental care for each child through placement in a dental home. Prevention services are quick and easy for the children, most services take about 15 minutes or less. The MDPH-SEAL Program serves all children with consent to participate, regardless of their insurance status or ability to pay. Following science-based guidelines, MDPH-SEAL targets communities/school programs with children at high-risk for dental disease – those with greater than 50 percent participation in the free and reduced school lunch program. Over the last 5 years the MDPH-SEAL Program has placed dental sealants on more than 35,000 teeth.

For more information visit our website at www.mass.gov/dph/oralhealth

To discuss the MDPH-SEAL Program for your school or community program call 617-624-5573 or email Oral.Health@state.ma.us



Facts about MDPH-SEAL

What is the MDPH SEAL Program?

- It's a dental program offered by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Office of Oral Health and provides no additional cost to parents/caregivers.
- A licensed dental hygienist employed by the Department of Public Health will:
 - Assess the child's oral health
 - Apply sealants, if needed
 - Apply topical fluoride
 - Contact the child's parent/caregiver if the child needs to see a dentist for examination/diagnose and possible follow-up care.
 - Provide referrals for free/reduced cost dental care if the child does not have their own dentist
 - Re-assess the child's oral health status

If a child is receiving regular dental care are they eligible to participate?

- Yes, any child with parent/caregiver consent is eligible to receive the preventive dental services provided by the MDPH- SEAL Program.

How long will each child be away from their classroom learning or program activities?

- The dental assessment takes about 2 minutes.
- The sealant and fluoride application takes no more than 20 minutes.

Can a parent or caregiver observe their child receiving the preventive dental services?

- With school/program approval, parents and caregivers are welcome to attend the dental visit.

Is there an incentive for my child to participate?

- Better oral health with sealants and fluoride to prevent tooth decay is the most important incentive.
- Children with consent to participate in the program also receive a goody bag with a toothbrush, toothpaste and a prize after they have received their sealants and fluoride.

Does my child's school participate in the MDPH-SEAL Program?

- The program is currently serving school-age children in 13 communities statewide. Check with your school nurse or principal or contact the Department of Public Health.

More than 52 million school hours are lost each year due to dental problems or missing school because of dental treatment.

