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. Nationally, tooth decay is five times more common than childhood asthma and seven times more common than hay fever. Tooth decay, left untreated, can cause pain and tooth loss.

What is the impact of dental sealants?
Dental sealants are a thin plastic coating placed on the pits and fissures of the chewing surfaces of teeth. 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. According to the Surgeon General’s 2000 report on oral health, sealants have been shown to reduce decay by more than 70 percent. The combination of sealants and fluoride has the potential to nearly eliminate tooth decay in school-age children.

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. The CDC estimated that if 50 percent of children at high risk participated in school sealant programs, more than half of their tooth decay would be prevented and money would be saved on their treatment costs. School-based sealant programs reduce disparities for children.
How is North Dakota doing?

- The 2004 North Dakota Basic Screening Survey found that: ¹
  - Fifty-three percent of third-graders had at least one dental sealant.
  - Fifty-six percent of third-graders had experienced tooth decay.
  - Seventeen percent of third-graders had untreated tooth decay.
  - The percentage of North Dakota children with untreated tooth decay and dental sealants present was unevenly distributed in the state, with greater unmet needs in minority populations.

- In 2006, 16 percent of North Dakota Medicaid children received at least one preventive oral health service.¹⁰

- North Dakota currently does not have any school-based dental sealant programs to reach high risk children.

What is North Dakota doing?

- In 2006, 96 percent of North Dakota’s population using public water systems had access to optimal levels of fluoride in their drinking water.¹¹

- In 2007, North Dakota began developing a plan for school-based sealant programs to reach high-risk children.

References


Strategies for North Dakota’s Future

- Increase public awareness of the effectiveness of dental sealants.
- Promote and fund school-based dental sealant programs for high-risk children.
- Maintain North Dakota’s community water fluoridation program.