

# Dental Public Health Activity Descriptive Summary

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## Oral Health / Dental Sealant Survey

On a biennial basis, the NJ Department of Health and Senior Services (NJDHSS) conducts a survey to determine the prevalence of dental sealants on the molar teeth of New Jersey third grade students. The Oral Health Survey is distributed to parents/guardian of third graders at randomly selected public elementary schools throughout the State. When the survey was initially conducted, the parent recall survey included one question that required the parent/guardian to check the appropriate response box to the sealant question: "Does your child have a sealant on a back tooth?" The survey relied on the self-reporting by parents/guardian and their recall of whether sealants had been placed.

Additional questions were added in years 2007, 2009 and 2011. The 2011 survey was distributed to 5,287 third grade students for completion by the parents/guardian at a total of 68 schools. The response rate was 69%, with 3,588 parents/guardian responding to the following six questions:

- Does Your Child Have a Sealant on a Back Tooth?
- Has Your Child Ever Had a Cavity?
- Has Your Child Had a Dental Checkup in the Last Year?
- Has Your Child Ever Had a Toothache?
- Do You Ever Feel Afraid or Nervous About Visiting the Dentist?
- Does Your Child Have Dental Insurance?

Since the Oral Health Survey is completed anonymously, non-responders are unknown. Potential sources of bias include unknown bias due to non-returns, unknown bias of "don't know" responses, and the accuracy of parental recall. Costs include the printing of approximately 4,000 surveys and staff time.

The survey provides a baseline to monitor progress toward Healthy People 2020's objective to increase the proportion of children who have dental sealants on their permanent molar teeth. This survey also serves to provide data to address one of the performance indicators of the Title V Maternal Child Health Block Grant.

Survey results are available at: [http://www.nj.gov/health/fhs/oral/oralhealth\\_data.shtml](http://www.nj.gov/health/fhs/oral/oralhealth_data.shtml)

### Lessons Learned:

- Response rate will be increased by follow-up with nurses prior to survey pick-up.
- In order to increase response rate, provide an incentive to students to return the completed survey. Student incentives may include an oral health care kit (toothbrush, toothpaste, tooth brushing timer, and floss).
- Collect surveys in-person rather than return via mail to reduce the risk of surveys being lost.
- Provide a timeframe for survey pick-up rather than scheduling a specific date (this is an important point to consider if the survey is conducted during months when inclement weather conditions may cause school closings.)

- Allow adequate time between school selection and survey distribution for securing principal and superintendent approval of survey participation.

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