

Dental Public Health Activity Descriptive Summary

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New Mexico School-Based Prevention Program

The New Mexico Department of Health (DOH), Office of Oral Health (OOH) administers a school-based dental sealant program that provides oral health education, dental screenings, and dental sealant applications on first and second permanent molars. The dental sealant program was developed to provide preventive services for school children to reduce tooth decay, since many low-income children have limited or no access to preventive dental care. In rural areas, all elementary school children are eligible to participate in the dental sealant program. In urban areas, the services are limited to the first, second and third grade students. The program is supported by state staff and by contracted private dental providers. For the program conducted by the state staff, dental case management services are also included. The services are provided for those children with Class II or III caries. The dental case manager work with the parents or guardians of the children to ensure that the child sees a dentist for further treatment or helping them secure a dental home. The New Mexico DOH General Fund along with Federal grants support the program allowing services to be offered at no cost to the parents or guardians and to participating schools. Elementary schools qualify for the program if they have at least 50% or more of its student population on the free and reduced school lunch program. In addition to the dental sealant program, the Office also conducts a fluoride varnish program targeting pre-school aged children in New Mexico. The program consists of providing oral health education, a dental assessment, application of the fluoride varnish (3 times a year), parental notification recommending seeing a dentist if needed, and dental case management services for those with Class II or III. Funding for the dental sealant program is from the State General Fund. The Fluoride Varnish Program is supported by the State General Fund and CDC Funds.

The Department of Health's Strategic Plan FY 17 had identified a number of health indicators to improve the health status of New Mexicans. Oral health is one of the 12. The following are the program strategies for New Mexico:

- Increase the number of dental providers serving the uninsured and low income
- Increase the number of Medicaid dental providers
- Increase the number of children receiving preventive services
- Promote the importance of oral health
- Increase the consumption of fluoridated water.

Both the dental sealant and fluoride varnish program contribute the Department's goal to improve the health status of New Mexicans.

Lessons Learned:

- It is critical to have good communication with schools to ensure that there is adequate space for the equipment, students are present for the services, and consent forms have been collected by the schools.
- Clearly communicate the program's expectations to each school; be sure the school nurse understands the program's requirement for space (many schools have limited space) and the length of time needed to complete the sealant services.

- Always have back-up equipment. Since the program requires traveling to schools that are located one to two hours from the home office, time is wasted if there is a need to return to the office for replacement equipment.
- Remain flexible with scheduling screening and treatment days and how to set up in each school.

Plans for improvement

- OOH is planning to develop a new database to better track the dental sealant program services, retention rates, and identify the prevalence of dental caries.
- Increase the number of schools participating in the dental sealant program and expanding the program to adolescents through school based health centers.
- Increasing the number of consent forms obtained by the local schools by providing incentives to the school nurse and teachers.
- Continued partnership with local communities to promote school based oral health programs.

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