

# Preventive Health Behaviors: Oral Health



Tooth decay is the most prevalent chronic disease of school-age children in the United States, despite being preventable.<sup>1</sup> While untreated tooth decay has decreased in Ohio, there has been no change in tooth decay by the third grade.<sup>2</sup> This indicates that while progress has been made on treating dental disease for school-age children in Ohio, there has not been significant improvement in preventing tooth decay. The Community Guide recommends community water fluoridation and school-based dental sealant delivery programs as the most effective methods of community-based prevention for tooth decay.<sup>3</sup>

## Children's Preventive Dental Care

Professional dental care is a necessary component of preventive health care and maintaining good oral health.<sup>4</sup> However, many children do not visit a dentist annually.

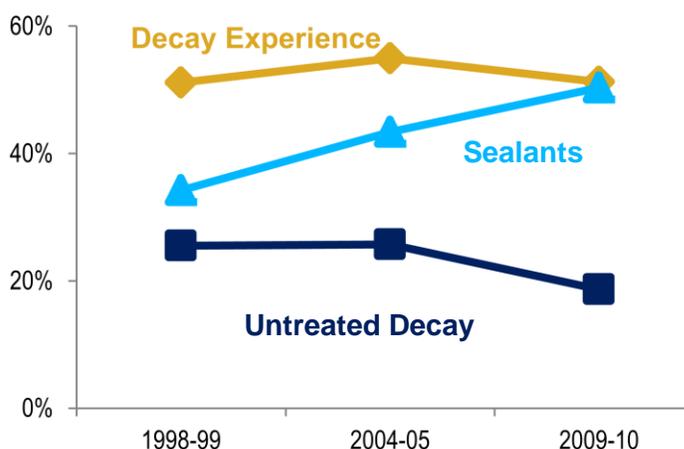
- Almost one in four children did not have a preventive dental visit in the past 12 months.<sup>5</sup>
- Lower-income parents and parents who reported their children do not have private dental coverage were significantly less likely to report their child had visited a dentist in the past 12 months.<sup>2</sup>
- Less than half of children enrolled in Medicaid had a dental claim within the past year.<sup>6</sup>
- The percentage of adolescents who reported seeing a dentist in the past 12 months has significantly decreased since 2003 from almost 73 percent to just under 67 percent in 2011.<sup>7</sup>

## Children and Dental Sealants

Dental sealants are thin, plastic coatings placed on molar teeth to prevent the most common type of tooth decay. Evidence shows that dental sealants are the most effective way to prevent and reduce the most common form of tooth decay in children.<sup>3,8</sup>

- The prevalence of sealants has risen in the past decade in Ohio. Most recently, just over 50 percent of third-grade schoolchildren had one or more dental sealants in 2009-2010.<sup>2</sup> This is an 92 percent increase over the past 20 years, up from 26 percent in 1992-93. Ohio was one of only 11 states to reach the 50 percent threshold as of 2011.
- Children in rural, non-Appalachian counties are significantly less likely to have sealants than their Appalachian, metropolitan, and suburban counterparts.<sup>2</sup>

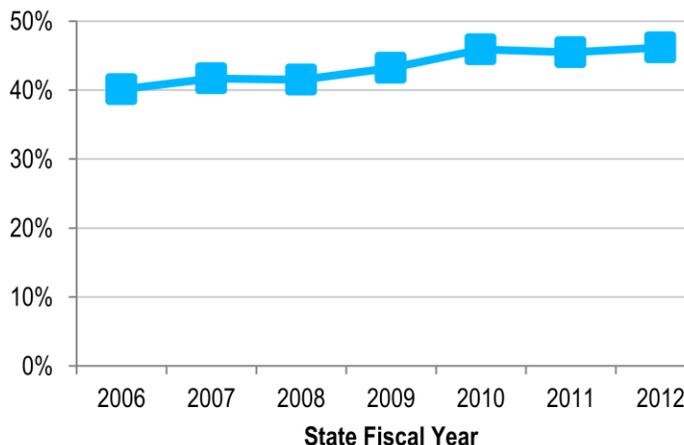
## Trends in the Prevalence of Oral Health Indicators among Ohio Third-Grade Children, 1998-2010



Source: Ohio Make Your Smile Count! Oral Health Screening Survey

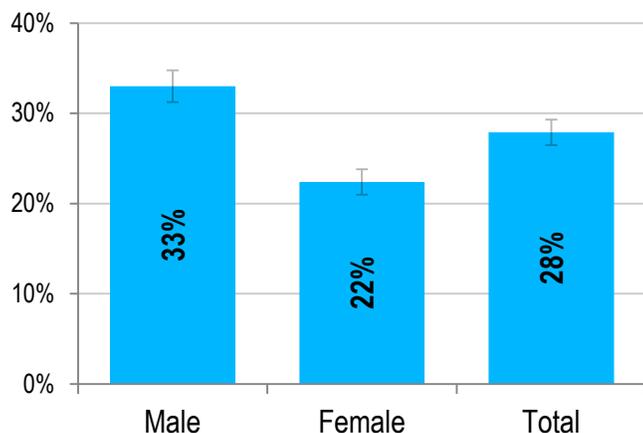
**More than half of children enrolled in Medicaid do not visit a dentist annually, and that number has remained relatively unchanged since 2006**

## Percentage of Children Age 3 through 18 Years Enrolled in Medicaid with a Dental Claim in Ohio, 2006-2012



Source: Ohio Department of Health analysis of Ohio Medicaid Claims Data

### Self-Reported Tobacco Use\* Among Ohio High School Students, 2011



\*Includes cigarette, cigar, chewing tobacco, snuff and dip use

Source: Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2011

## Tobacco Use

Tobacco use has been identified as the primary risk factor in 75 percent of all oral cancers in the United States.<sup>9</sup>

- More than one-quarter of Ohio high school students report using tobacco.<sup>7</sup>

## Community Water Fluoridation

Community water fluoridation is a cornerstone of public health and one of the most effective ways to prevent tooth decay.<sup>3</sup> Currently, 92 percent of Ohioans on public water systems have optimally fluoridated water. Over 1 million Ohioans are not served by a community water system and the fluoridation status of those systems remains unknown.



## What Is Being Done to Improve Oral Health for Children in Ohio?

Several programs in Ohio aim to improve the oral health of school-aged children and adolescents.

### • School-Based Dental Sealant Programs

- 20 school-based sealant programs serve children in 51 of 88 counties and reach half of all eligible low-income schools in the state.
  - In 2013, new partnerships were developed with two Northeast Ohio safety net dental care programs: Ronald McDonald Mobile at University Hospital in Cleveland and Humility of Mary Health Partners Foundation-Smile Station in Youngstown.
- About 30,000 children in low-income schools receive sealants annually through these programs.
- Unfortunately, program participation has been steadily declining for several years. Currently, less than 40 percent of eligible students receive sealants despite program efforts to improve participation.

### • Other School-Based Oral Health Programs

- 11 safety-net dental programs operate in Ohio schools serving children in more than 25 counties.
- In 2012-13, more than 24,000 children in schools located in 40 counties participated in the fluoride mouth rinse program. This program serves schools located in non-fluoridated communities.

### • Fluoridation Assistance Program

- This Ohio Department of Health program assists public water supply systems by reimbursing a portion of the cost to purchase new or replacement fluoridation equipment and/or supplies. The program is funded through the generous support of the Delta Dental Foundation.

### • Tobacco Use Prevention and Cessation Program

- This Ohio Department of Health program supports tobacco-free policies for schools, public places, and worksites. The program is active in tobacco use prevention efforts among youth and works to reduce secondhand smoke exposure in multi-unit housing.

*“One proven strategy for identifying and treating children at high risk for dental disease is through school-based programs that support linkages with health care professionals and other dental partners in the community.”*

*—Filling the Gap: Strategies for Improving Oral Health based on a Grantmakers in Health Issue Dialogue*

**Data Note:** Bars on figures represent 95% Confidence Intervals.

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