

## Colorado

### Adopting a New Data System to Evaluate Sealant Programs

#### Public Health Problem

The Colorado Oral Health Unit (COHU) began supporting school-based dental sealant programs 10 years ago in metropolitan Denver. Based on the successes of these early programs, sealant programs have been expanded throughout Colorado's "Front Range" communities, where 80% of the state's population resides. Until recently, it had been a challenge for the oral health program to determine the appropriate funding level for each program. Data were not collected in a uniform way, making data interpretation difficult.

#### Evidence That Prevention Works

Dental sealants are a plastic material painted on the chewing surfaces of teeth, where up to 90% of the decay occurs in schoolchildren. Sealants prevent tooth decay by providing a physical barrier between the teeth and decay-causing bacteria. In its review of studies on school-based dental sealant programs, the U.S. Task Force on Community Preventive Services found that the median decrease in decay on the chewing surfaces of posterior teeth in children was 60%.

#### Program Example

In order to collect data in a systematic way to support program funding decisions, the state adopted SEALS (Sealant Efficiency Assessment for Locals and States), a software package developed by CDC to assess the cost-effectiveness of dental sealant programs. As a result, the COHU has been able to shift from supporting individual sealant programs to supporting one coordinated state program. There has been a drastic improvement in the quality of the data reported and increased accountability from contractors providing sealants. The contractors have formed a Sealant Advisory Committee to share information and avoid duplication of services to schools. The COHU now has quality data to track program success and to inform future program priorities. It also has been able to track whether children participating in sealant programs are referred for follow-up care to dentist in the community.

#### Implications

Often, changing or adopting a new system can be difficult, but the Colorado Oral Health Unit saw this step as an essential element for having a cohesive sealant program. Although initially contractors were reluctant to use SEALS, the COHU provided the support and technical assistance needed. These data will ultimately be used to track services and to improve the quality of care provided to the children of Colorado.