

Michigan Children Get Special Help To Reduce Tooth Decay

Main Category: Dentistry

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A special program, Varnish! Michigan, funded by Delta Dental and administered by the Michigan Department of Community Health, is helping to prevent tooth decay in nearly 16,000 children enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start programs throughout the state.

Launched in the fall of 2007 with a \$250,000 grant from Delta Dental, the program provides applications of fluoride varnish on the teeth of low-income children up to five years of age.

"Fluoride varnish is one of the most effective treatments to prevent tooth decay," said Jed Jacobson, D.D.S., M.S., M/P.H., chief science officer at Delta Dental. "It is safe and simple to apply. We are delighted to be partnering with the Michigan Department of Community Health on this effort to improve the oral health of thousands of low-income children."

Children enrolled in Head Start (ages three to five) will receive two applications of fluoride varnish, and children enrolled in Early Head Start (ages birth to three) will receive four applications. State officials expect the treatment to reduce decay between 48 and 60 percent in this group of children.

The first application of fluoride varnish was applied in the fall of 2007. Many of the participants are receiving their second application this month.

"Many of these children have little to no access to dental care, and unfortunately, they develop a dental disease before they reach third grade," said Janet Olszewski, MDCH Director, adding that one in four Michigan children have untreated dental disease. "We know dental decay is entirely preventable and with this generous grant from Delta Dental, thousands of at-risk children will get a healthy 'dental start' in life."

According to the MDCH, 13 Varnish! Michigan programs are currently in operation. They expect to provide approximately 32,000 applications of fluoride varnish to the teeth of almost 16,000 children by Sept. 30, 2008. In addition, children are receiving dental screenings and referrals for treatment and ongoing care. Parents or caregivers, and Head Start staff, are also provided with educational materials about the importance of good dental health habits.

Delta Dental of Michigan, with its affiliates in Ohio, Indiana, and Tennessee, is one of the largest dental plan administrators in the nation. In 2006, the enterprise paid out more than \$1.7 billion for dental care for more than 6.2 million enrollees. Offices are located in Okemos and Farmington Hills, Michigan; Columbus and Cleveland, Ohio; Indianapolis and Greenwood, Indiana; and Nashville, Knoxville, and Memphis, Tennessee.

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