

Maryland's Children Face Critical Gap in Oral Disease Prevention

Survey Highlights Need for Stronger Medical-Dental Collaboration

Dental sealants are an evidence-based, highly effective dental caries prevention intervention that prevents over **80%** of decay in permanent molars. However, data from the 2022-2023 Oral Health Survey of Maryland School Children reveal that **59%** of third-grade students in Maryland have an unmet need for dental sealants, with disparities existing across racial, socioeconomic, and geographic lines.

6 in 10 third graders need dental sealants but don't have them.

Key Survey Findings

- **Unmet Need by Race and Ethnicity:** Six in 10 third graders need dental sealants but don't have them. African American and Hispanic children have a higher rate of unmet need for dental sealants. **66.5%** of African American children and **65.3%** of Hispanic children had unmet need for dental sealants, compared to **49.8%** of White children.

**Rate of Unmet Dental Care Need in Maryland Children
(By Race and Ethnicity)**



Figure 1: Rate of Unmet Dental Care Need by Race and Ethnicity

- **Equal Access Across Sexes:** Unmet needs are almost identical between boys and girls. **59.4%** of boys and **58.7%** of girls had unmet sealant care needs.

Rate of Unmet Dental Care Need In Maryland Children (By Sex)

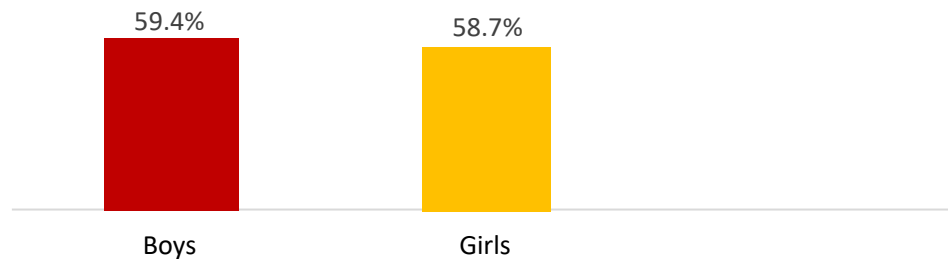


Figure 2: Rate of Unmet Dental Care Need by Sex

- **School Income Level Impact:** Children in lower-income schools are nearly **1.7x** more likely to lack sealants. The need is highest in schools with National School Lunch Program participation (NSLP). **75.3%** of children in schools with **50-74%** NSLP participation lack sealants, compared to **43.7%** of children in schools with less than **25%** NSLP participation.
- **Geographic Differences:** *Location matters.* Western Maryland shows the highest gap in dental sealant care among children, with **72.6%** of children lacking sealant care, compared to **43.5%** of children in the state's Western region.

Public Health Implications

The findings support targeted expansion of school-based sealant- and preventive-dental programs, particularly in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities and populations experiencing racial, ethnic and geographic disparities.

Summary Clinical Takeaway

Dental sealants prevent over 80% of molar decay. Closing Maryland's **59%** unmet need gap requires shared responsibility between medical and dental clinicians: prompt screening at ages 6–9, same-day application in dental clinics, medical referral during well-child visits, and prioritized public health outreach in Western Maryland and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities.

Source: Oral Health Survey of Maryland School Children, 2022–2023