Weekly Fluoride Mouthrinse Program Is Re-Implemented In North Carolina Schools
North Carolina Dental Gazette Article
Volume 28 · Number 4 · Winter 2006

The North Carolina Oral Health Section is re-implementing the weekly school-based fluoride mouthrinse program in 2007.

In 1974, a fluoride mouthrinse program was piloted in North Carolina at Winstead School in Wilson County. After three years a 34% reduction in decayed, missing and filled permanent teeth was achieved. Through the support and community activities of the North Carolina Oral Health Section (NCOHS) staff the program expanded and served approximately 420,000 children at its peak in the early 1990s.

In 2002 the Oral Health Section discontinued the school-based Weekly Fluoride Mouthrinse Program (FMR). In large part this was due to the huge budget deficits experienced by state government in North Carolina which resulted in fewer funds for dental preventive services. The decision was also based on a review of the Oral Health Section's programs, services and resources.

As you are probably aware, the NCOHS has always used current science and research to evaluate our program services. There was no recent data on the effectiveness of the school-based fluoride mouthrinse program and it was decided to target our prevention activities to the two recommendations which received the strongest support of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

These two recommendations were:

- To begin or continue community water fluoridation.
- To provide school-based dental sealant delivery programs.

The Oral Health Section has included both of these prevention activities for many years.

The rationale for re-implementing the FMR is based on data from the Oral Health Section's 2003-2004 statewide dental survey of school children. We looked at children's history of participation in the school FMR program and we linked that information to each child's clinical findings.

It showed that low income (free/reduced lunch) children who participated in the mouthrinse program had decay rates almost as low as higher income children who did not qualify for free/reduced lunch. This shows that FMR is an important tool in reducing dental health disparities.

The NC General Assembly, in its 2006 session, appropriated money to re-implement the fluoride mouthrinse program and increase the number of other dental preventive services that the NCOHS provides to children in the state. Furthermore, the NCOHS will continue to receive the majority of our Preventive Health and Health Services block grant money for sealants and community water fluoridation.

Therefore, the NCOHS plans to re-implement the school-based fluoride mouthrinse program in a very targeted manner to schools with many children at highest risk for dental decay. One of the best predictors of decay in permanent teeth is decay in the primary teeth. We are currently laying the groundwork and plan to begin mouthrinsing in January 2007. For the first year, we will be limited to about 50,000 children, but we hope to expand this number in the future if funding permits.

The support of private practicing dentists in North Carolina has always been beneficial to the participation of students in the Weekly Fluoride Mouthrinse Program. The data also showed that even children at low risk for decay received some benefit from participating in the mouthrinse program. If parents ask about their children participating, please encourage them to do so.