



## 802 SMILES NETWORK OF SCHOOL DENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS

### FAQs for Dental Health Care Providers

October 2023

#### **How does an 802 Smiles school-based dental health program work?**

In most programs, an 802 Smiles dental hygienist comes to the school and provides a range of preventive services to students who have a signed consent form. Services offered by hygienists range from screenings and oral hygiene education to fluoride varnish and silver diamine fluoride (SDF) applications, and sealants. There are some programs that employ a dentist; these programs are able to provide both preventive and restorative dental care. Programs in the 802 Smiles Network are organized by Tier, depending on what services are offered (see this [802 Smiles Tiers infographic](#) for details).

School-based dental health programs make it easier for students to receive care because they don't need to travel to an appointment and parents don't need to take time off of work. The Community Preventive Services Task Force (CPSTF) [recommends school-based programs](#) to deliver dental sealants and prevent dental caries (tooth decay) among children.

#### **How do families sign their child up for the program?**

Parents receive an information packet about the school-based dental health program, including a consent form. Families can enroll their child in the program by reviewing these materials, signing the consent form, and returning it to the school (for consent forms and other relevant documents, see the [802 Smiles webpage](#)). All children in the participating school are eligible to participate in the 802 Smiles program; however, children who have not been to a dentist in over a year are prioritized.

#### **How will families know what treatment their child received?**

Families will receive a copy of the [Report on Dental Findings](#) from the 802 Smiles dental hygienist explaining the results from the dental screening and what treatment(s) the child received, along with any follow-up recommendations. For children who have a dentist on file, that dentist will also receive the Report on Dental Findings. For children who do not have a dentist, the 802 Smiles hygienist will help families connect with a local dental office where their child can receive comprehensive and ongoing dental care. In this case, the receiving dental office will also get a copy of the Report on Dental Findings.

#### **Do students need X-rays before being treated at school? What happens if a sealant is placed over an existing cavity?**

There is no need to take an X-ray before the child receives preventive dental services. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends avoiding X-rays for the sole



purpose of placing sealants (see CDC's guidelines and recommendations for [Implementation of School Sealant Programs](#)).

Based on the current evidence, the American Dental Association recommends sealants to arrest or reverse noncavitated carious lesions in both primary and permanent teeth (see [Evidence-based clinical practice guideline on nonrestorative treatments for carious lesions, JADA, October 2018](#)).

### **How can the 802 Smiles Network improve the oral health of Vermont children?**

[Screening surveys](#) conducted in Vermont schools showed that the rates of dental sealants and dental decay among Vermont children have not improved in recent years. One [evidence-based](#) way to improve the oral health of children is to offer preventive dental services in schools, making it easier for children to receive care without the need to travel to an appointment.

In addition to offering preventive dental care, 802 Smiles dental hygienists can provide dental health education, help connect families with a dental home, and provide other related services that the school community considers helpful (e.g., helping families verify eligibility and enroll with Medicaid when eligible, and setting up transportation or interpretation services when needed).

### **How much will it cost for a school to have an 802 Smiles school-based dental health program? How much will these services cost to the families?**

Costs to run an 802 Smiles program vary depending on the range of services being offered (see [Tiers infographic](#)). Services offered in Tiers 3 and up have the strongest evidence for preventing/managing tooth decay (i.e., offering SDF and sealants on site impacts oral health outcomes more than only offering care coordination and oral hygiene education in the classroom, as in Tiers 1 and 2).

Currently, in most programs there is no direct cost to families who sign their child up to participate in 802 Smiles.

### **How are schools chosen to participate in a school-based dental health program?**

While any school in VT can potentially participate in 802 Smiles, priority is given to those schools with the greatest need, according to CDC-established criteria (Public Elementary and Middle Schools with Free and Reduced Meals eligibility rates 50% or greater). Other criteria that may be considered are a needs assessment conducted by the Vermont Department of Health's Oral Health Program and the School Nurses' perception of need (which may be supported by data in the School Nurse Report).



### **How are students prioritized by the 802 Smiles program?**

Children who have not been to the dentist in over a year are prioritized by 802 Smiles programs. In addition, 802 Smiles dental hygienists receive guidance to prioritize students in specific grades for provision of preventive clinical services. That's because dental sealants are proven to help prevent cavities in permanent first and second molars (which emerge around ages 6-7 and 11-14, respectively). The grades targeted for sealant application correspond to the approximate ages in which these permanent molars appear in the mouth. This ensures that sealants are applied as soon as the tooth erupts, before it has a chance to develop a cavity. Since we recommend use of glass ionomer-based materials, partially erupted molars can also benefit from sealants in 802 Smiles programs. This helps protect immature enamel, which has been shown to be most susceptible for development of decay (see [Glass Ionomer Fissure Sealants for Proactive Intervention, Goldstep & Delios, 2018](#)).

### **Who will be providing these services to the students? Will there be a dentist at the school?**

While a few 802 Smiles programs include dentists (Tier 5 programs), most school-based programs rely on registered dental hygienists (RDHs) to provide preventive dental services to students in participating schools. As required by the Board of Dental Examiners, these RDHs work under a [General Supervision Agreement](#) with a VT-licensed dentist.

RDHs are trained to provide dental screenings, oral health education, and preventive dental services such as topical fluorides and sealants. In addition to their schooling, RDHs participating in 802 Smiles receive ongoing training that allows them to stay abreast of the most current best practices. These trainings focus on dental public health, cultural humility, health equity, infection prevention and control practices, evidence-based minimally invasive dentistry, and other relevant topics, as appropriate.

### **Is it safe for children to receive dental services at school?**

Absolutely. The dental professionals providing services at the school-based program are licensed/registered with the Vermont Board of Dental Examiners. In addition, they receive ongoing education and training on best practices in dental public health and infection prevention and control. Also, school-based dental health programs meet strict CDC and OSHA's infection control guidelines to ensure the safety of all students receiving services, as well as of the professionals providing these services and all the individuals in the school.

### **Is there a risk that the family will think that their child doesn't need to go to the dentist if they are getting dental care at school?**

While preventive services and, in some programs (Tier 5), fillings and other dental treatments can be provided at school, we recognize that it is very important for all children to have a dental home where they can receive ongoing, comprehensive care. Also, regular visits to a dental professional are a healthy habit that should last throughout a person's lifetime, even after they



grow up and are out of school. We make sure that this information is clearly conveyed to the entire school community, including students and their families.

From the dental practice's standpoint, there is research demonstrating that providing basic dental services in community settings such as schools help free up chair time in the office for more complex needs that require specific equipment and the skills of a dentist (see [A model for extending the reach of the traditional dental practice, JADA, August 2008](#)).

### **Who will have access to the child's information, and how will data be used?**

802 Smiles providers deal with children's protected health information (PHI) in a manner that is compliant with both FERPA and HIPAA. Records will be accessed to facilitate further treatment and to evaluate the effectiveness of this program. Access to each child's data is restricted to the provider(s) collecting the data, to the child's dentist (when available), and to Vermont Department of Health (VDH) Oral Health Program staff (VDH Data Analyst, 802 Smiles Coordinator, and Oral Health Program Director).

If a family indicates on the consent form that they do not give permission to share data, their child's information will not be recorded in the system.

### **Additional Resources**

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Oral Health – School Sealant Programs](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Healthy Schools – Oral Health](#)

[Keep Smiling Vermont – The Oral Health of Vermont's Children 2016-2017](#)

[Seal America – The Prevention Invention – Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[The Community Guide Systematic Reviews – Dental Caries \(Cavities\): School-Based Dental Sealant Delivery Programs](#)