



States Stalled on Dental Sealants

Tennessee

Dental sealants are clear plastic coatings that take only a few minutes to apply to permanent molars, the most cavity-prone teeth. Research shows that school-based sealant programs reduce tooth decay by 60 percent at one-third the cost of a filling. Tennessee passed a law allowing hygienists to place sealants in schools without a dentist's prior exam, which earned the state more points but not enough to raise the state's grade. Tennessee's grade in 2014, a D, did not change from 2012.

D

2014
Grade

2012 Grade: **D**

How well is Tennessee protecting kids from tooth decay?

Sealant benchmarks	2012	2014	Goal
Percentage of high-need schools with sealant programs	25-49%	25-49%	>75%
Unnecessary rules restricting hygienists from applying sealants in schools?*	Yes—severe restrictions	Yes—some restrictions	No restrictions
Participation in National Oral Health Surveillance System?	No data submitted	No data submitted	Yes—and submitted recent data
Meeting Healthy People 2010 sealant objective?	No	No	Yes

Grading

A	10-11
B	8-9
C	6-7
D	3-5
F	0-2



5

Tennessee earned 5 out of a possible 11 points on sealant policies.

For a detailed description of the grading system, see the methodology section of the report at pewtrusts.org/dentalsealants.

* Pew and the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors (ASTDD) surveyed states to learn whether regulations require dentists to examine children before hygienists can apply sealants at schools —restrictions that research shows are unnecessary. State policies were categorized as follows: A dentist's exam is not required – no restrictions; a dentist's exam is sometimes required (e.g., certain classifications of dental hygienists can apply sealants without a dentist's prior exam) – some restrictions; a dentist's exam is always required – severe restrictions; and a dentist's exam is always required and the dentist must remain on-site while the hygienist applies the sealant – most severe restrictions.