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CALIFORNIA LAUNCHES STATEWIDE CAMPAIGN TO DECREASE MISSED SCHOOL DAYS DUE TO DENTAL PROBLEMS

Smile, California launching a mobile dental van tour that will bring sealants to children and youth residing in rural parts of the state

New resources available in English and Spanish for parents, caregivers, community organizations, and more

SACRAMENTO – *Smile, California*, an effort by the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), today launched *Sealants for a Healthy Smile*, a statewide campaign to encourage parents and guardians to protect their children's teeth by ensuring they see a dentist regularly. The campaign emphasizes the application of sealants as a preventive measure against tooth decay.

"Healthy teeth not only help children eat, speak, and sleep better, but they also help them to perform better in school," said **Jacey Cooper, State Medicaid Director and DHCS Chief Deputy Director for Health Care Programs**. "Despite the benefits of maintaining healthy teeth, tooth decay is the most chronic yet preventable health care need among California's children."

WHY THIS MATTERS: Children experiencing pain from tooth decay or gum disease have difficulty concentrating in school and face an increased likelihood of school absenteeism. While the number of children and teens who missed at least one day of school due to dental problems decreased significantly from 446,000 in 2018 to 270,000 in 2021, there is still work to do to ensure all California youth see a dentist regularly.

As part of the campaign, *Smile, California* launched a mobile dental van tour that will bring sealants to children and youth residing in rural parts of the state. Stops will be made in the following counties: Sacramento, Amador, Calaveras, Colusa, Lake, Nevada, Mariposa, and Tehama.

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To support this positive movement, *Smile, California*, DHCS' Medi-Cal Dental campaign to help Medi-Cal members use their dental benefits, is partnering with the California Department of Public Health's Office of Oral Health and its 60 Local Oral Health Programs and the California Department of Education to implement *Sealants for a Healthy Smile*. This collaborative statewide push aims to encourage parents and guardians to schedule dental checkups for their children and to request they have molar sealants applied.

"Sealants can reduce up to 80 percent of cavities in the back teeth, where 9 in 10 cavities occur," said **California's Dental Director, Dr. Jayanth Kumar, DDS, MPH**. "They are a thin, plastic coating that is quickly and painlessly applied to the chewing surfaces of the back teeth, where most cavities occur, and they work by creating a barrier that prevents food, plaque, and bacteria from getting into the grooves of the teeth."

Medi-Cal covers a variety of dental services for most members, including sealants, at low or no cost. If you don't have Medi-Cal, there are several ways to apply:

- BenefitsCal - <http://www.benefitscal.org/>
- Covered California - <https://www.coveredca.com/>
- In person at your [local county office](#)
- Filling out the single streamlined paper application (available in 11 languages) and mailing it to your local county office

CAMPAIGN RESOURCES: *Sealants for a Healthy Smile* includes an array of resources in English and Spanish, such as informational flyers, videos, fact sheets, presentations, and social media graphics, all of which are available for download on the new *Sealants for a Healthy Smile* page at SmileCalifornia.org and SonrieCalifornia.org. These resources will help parents, caregivers, and community partners across state to better understand how good dental care habits, especially regular dental visits, can help prevent pain, infection, and school absences.

"The goal of this statewide effort is to encourage more parents and guardians to take action and protect their children's dental health by scheduling a regular check-up and asking for sealants. With Medi-Cal Dental, all members under age 21 can have a dental check-up at least twice a year. We encourage you to schedule a dental appointment today," said **Adrianna Alcalá-Beshara, chief of DHCS' Medi-Cal Dental Services Division**.

To find a dentist or learn more about *Smile, California* or the *Sealants for a Healthy Smile* campaign, visit SmileCalifornia.org.

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