

# Healthy Smiles — Wisconsin's Third-grade Children



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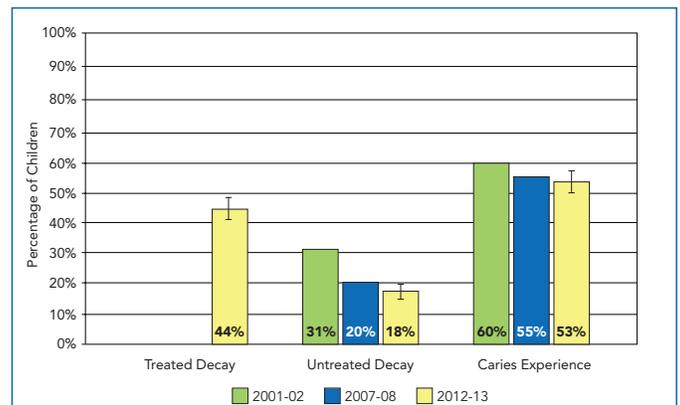
## Introduction

During the 2012-13 school year, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS), completed Healthy Smiles / Healthy Growth, a statewide representative survey on the oral health and height / weight status of Wisconsin's third-grade children. More than 2,800 third-grade children in public schools participated. Dental screenings and height / weight measurements were completed following the protocol of a Basic Screening Survey from the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors. Results were compared to similar surveys conducted in 2001-02 and the 2007-08 school years. Overall, it was found that tooth decay and obesity continue to be a problem for Wisconsin's children. The full report and methodology can be accessed at: <http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/P0/p00589.pdf>.

## Key Findings – Oral Health of Wisconsin Third-grade Children

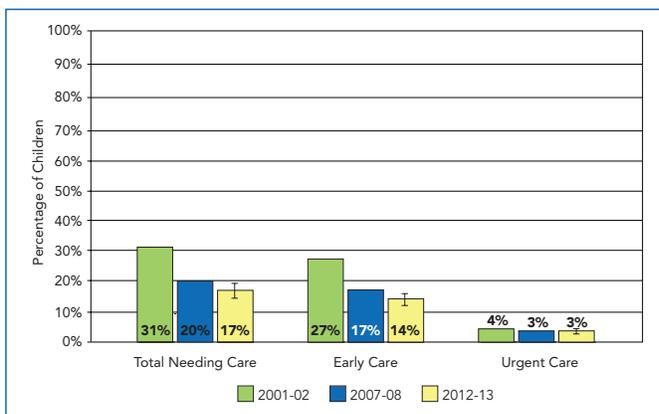
- Tooth decay is a significant public health problem, as 53 percent of third-graders have caries experience.
- Approximately 18 percent of third-graders have untreated dental decay and 3 percent have an urgent condition. While this is an improvement over previous surveys, there are still over 2,000 children requiring urgent dental care.
- Over 60 percent of third-graders have at least one dental sealant. This is an improvement over previous surveys and a positive finding as dental sealants are a well-accepted clinical intervention to prevent dental caries.
- The oral health disparity gap seems to be shrinking for access to dental sealants as children of all races and socioeconomic groups have similar levels of dental sealants. The school-based sealant programs likely play a major role in expanding availability of dental sealants to all children.

**Figure 1. Percentage of Wisconsin's Third-grade Children with Treated Decay, Untreated Decay, and Caries Experience, 2001-02, 2007-08, and 2012-13.**



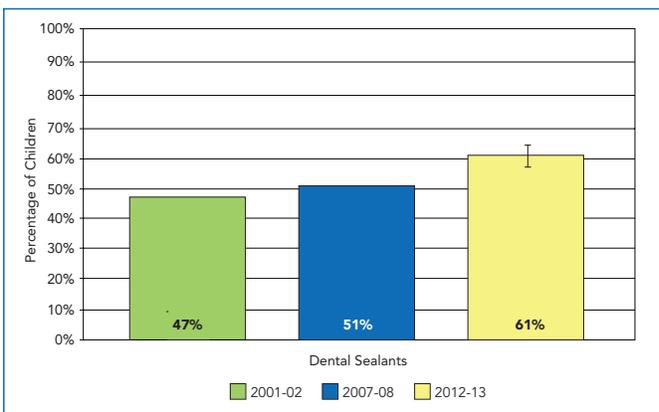
Caries experience is a combination of treated and untreated decay in the primary and / or permanent teeth. The 2012-13 survey found that 53 percent of third-graders had caries experience and almost 1 out of 5 had at least one tooth with untreated decay. Additionally, 44 percent of children had treated decay. Untreated decay among Wisconsin children has decreased from 31 percent in 2001-02, to 20 percent in 2007-08 to 18 percent in the latest survey. Caries experience has decreased in each of the three surveys to the current level of 53 percent.

**Figure 2. Percentage of Wisconsin's Third-grade Children Needing Early or Urgent Dental Care, 2001-02, 2007-08, and 2012-13.**



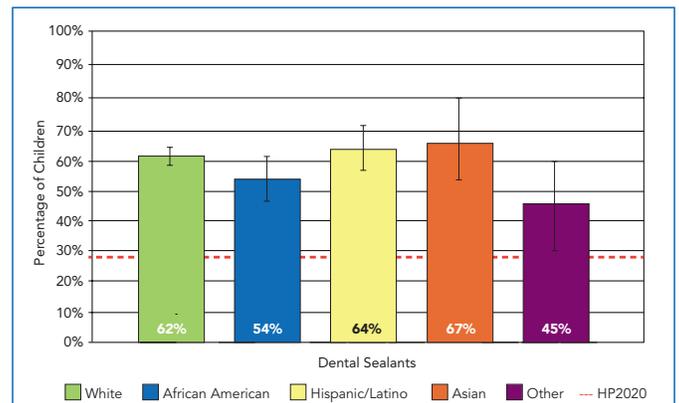
Seventeen percent of the third-grade children screened for the 2012-13 survey required dental care. Fourteen percent required early care, because the child needed to be seen by a dentist but was not experiencing signs of pain or infection. Three percent of children in the sample were identified as requiring urgent care, meaning that the oral condition usually involves pain or swelling and needs to be addressed within 24 to 48 hours.

**Figure 3. Percentage of Wisconsin's Third-grade Children with Dental Sealants, 2001-02, 2007-08, and 2012-13.**



Dental sealants are plastic coatings applied to the chewing surfaces of back teeth and are a safe, effective, evidence-based way to prevent tooth decay. In Wisconsin, 61 percent of third-grade children screened had at least one dental sealant on their permanent molars. The increase in dental sealants from 47 percent in 2001-02 to the current level of 61 percent suggests an increased access to dental sealants from both private and public programs.

**Figure 4. Percentage of Wisconsin's Third-grade Children with Dental Sealants by Race / Ethnicity, 2012-13.**



Wisconsin children from all races and ethnicities exceeded the Healthy People 2020 target of 28 percent for dental sealants. Almost all groups exceeded 50 percent for dental sealants, which suggests that dental sealants are equally available to all children.

**Conclusions**

Wisconsin's Healthy Smiles / Healthy Growth survey of third-grade children revealed positive trends. Caries experience and untreated decay have decreased over previous surveys and the prevalence of dental sealants has increased. Though caries experience levels demonstrate that dental decay is still a problem for Wisconsin children, the decrease in caries experience suggests that prevention programs are working. The most visible prevention programs are the school-based dental sealant programs.



Wisconsin Department of Health Services