

Fluoride Varnish Initiative “Paint a Smile”

Background and Purpose: Tooth decay, a disease known as cavities or caries, is the most common chronic infectious disease of children age two to five. In Arkansas, 61 percent of children under age nine have already experienced tooth decay. Among these children, untreated decay has been associated with difficulty eating, sleeping, learning, and proper nutrition. Much of this problem could be prevented by a timely application of fluoride varnish. One potential approach to increasing a timely application of fluoride varnish is to encourage primary health care providers to apply fluoride varnish during well-child visits at least 2-4 times per year. Primary health care providers see children at least 12 times during the first five years of their life for well-child visits.

In 2011, the Arkansas legislature passed ACT 90: An Act to authorize physicians and nurses to apply fluoride varnish to a child’s teeth after appropriate training. The goal of the program is to close the gaps that exist for children who do not have regular access to comprehensive dental care.

The potential benefits of primary health care providers and designated health care professionals that provide fluoride varnish are:

- A reduction in the risk of dental caries
- Initiation of a referral to a dental home
- Education for caregivers about dental caries etiology and prevention

What is Fluoride Varnish?

Fluoride varnish is a protective coating that is painted on teeth. Over a period, the varnish releases fluoride, which strengthens teeth and help, prevent tooth decay.

What does the Fluoride Varnish Initiative mean for Arkansas?

- Primary care physicians and their designated nurse or health care professional will receive a one hour training course
- Medicaid will reimburse primary health care providers \$19.95 per application of fluoride varnish.

What can you do to help?

- Become an early adopter of the program
 - Contact the Office of Oral Health and complete the one hour online training
 - Inform other physicians of the program
 - Educate your staff and if needed designate a nurse or health professional to participate in the one hour online course and apply fluoride varnish.

