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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Innovative Oral Health Program Shows Results
Pediatricians Effectively Providing Fluoride Varnish to Young Children in Primary Care

Baltimore, MD (May 15, 2008) – The Baltimore City Health Department has released a progress report on an innovative pilot program in which pediatric clinicians apply fluoride varnish to prevent cavities in young children. The project is a partnership between the Health Department and The University of Maryland School of Dentistry and is coordinated by Baltimore HealthCare Access.

Early tooth decay affects thousands of children in Baltimore City and across the state and can have short and long-term consequences, including missed school, pain, impaired nutrition and increased chances for decay once permanent teeth come in.

The goal of the pilot program is to test whether it is feasible to have doctor's offices in Maryland fight decay in children when they come for regular checkups by applying a low-cost fluoride treatment that is painted onto the teeth.

The four sites chosen for implementation were an academic center, two community health centers, and a private practitioner. Clinical staff members were trained by dental experts on topics in oral health and how to apply the varnish.

The progress report finds that:

- **All participating clinics have widely adopted the application of fluoride varnish.** Across four pilot sites, 91 clinicians participated in applying fluoride varnish. At least 809 children have received varnish treatments.
- **Approximately two-thirds of eligible children at well-child visits received varnish during the first 10 weeks of full data collection at each site.** This high rate of adoption during the startup phase compares well with the adoption rate of new immunizations and demonstrates that a population-wide impact is possible.
- **Applying fluoride varnish is feasible for pediatric clinics.** Each practice has developed an effective system to identify candidates for fluoride varnish, obtain consent, and apply the varnish. On average, staff used a total of about four minutes to prepare the patient's chart and gather supplies, explain fluoride varnish to parents and obtain consent, apply the varnish, and document the application.

- **Clinicians and parents strongly support applying fluoride varnish in primary care.** Staff at all four pilot sites positively rated the fluoride varnish program. Parents were pleased to be offered the opportunity for their children to receive the treatment at their pediatrician's office.
- **The successful implementation of a web-based registry allows convenient monitoring of fluoride applications by individual clinicians and by health departments.** The registry, modeled after the Baltimore Immunization Registry, allows clinicians to check when or if varnish was last applied to a specific child.
- **Fluoride varnish application by pediatric practices is ready for Medicaid adoption.** The project has demonstrated that the procedure is indeed feasible across the varied pediatric practice types in our state.

“We are very pleased with these results,” said Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein, Commissioner of Health. “Fluoride varnish has tremendous potential for preventing suffering from tooth decay.”

“This kind of innovative approach is critical to making Baltimore healthier,” said Mayor Sheila Dixon. “I thank the foundations for supporting this effort and the clinicians and parents for participating.”

“With tooth decay as the most prevalent chronic childhood disease, we simply must ensure that every single boy and girl has access to proper dental care. This program will take us great lengths in ending the unacceptable disparities in oral health and ensure that our children have the healthy smiles they deserve,” Congressman Elijah E. Cummings said.

The pilot project is funded by the Harry & Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, the Abell Foundation, CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, the Leonard and Helen R. Stulman Foundation, the Aaron and Lillie Straus Foundation and by in-kind contributions from the Baltimore City Health Department. It is coordinated by Baltimore Healthcare Access, Inc.

The full report is attached and can be accessed at www.baltimorecityhealth.org .

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