

**CITY OF BALTIMORE**

SHEILA DIXON, Mayor



**HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

Olivia D. Farrow, Esq., R.S.

Interim Commissioner

1001 E. Fayette Street

Baltimore, MD 21202

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

***MEDIA CONTACT: Brian Schleiter***

***PHONE: 443-984-2623***

***[Mediahealth@baltimorecity.gov](mailto:Mediahealth@baltimorecity.gov)***

## Baltimore City Health Department and Baltimore Medical System Celebrate National Dental Hygiene Month

**BALTIMORE, MD** (October 6, 2009) – Tooth decay is a chronic disease that affects thousands of Baltimore children. It causes pain, impairs nutrition, and interrupts learning.

Yet tooth decay is largely preventable. Fluoride varnish applied regularly between the ages of 6 months to 5 years can reduce tooth decay by 46 percent.

The Baltimore City Health Department today announces the successful conclusion of a 19-month pilot program aimed at increasing access to dental services through the application of fluoride varnish to at-risk children in primary care settings. Fluoride varnish has been shown to prevent or reduce cavities in the primary teeth of young children and is effective in preventing decay of permanent teeth. Lack of access to dental care is especially a concern for young children, who typically don't see a dentist until they are age 3.

In celebration of the close of the Pediatric Dental Fluoride Varnish Program and National Dental Hygiene Month, Interim Commissioner Olivia D. Farrow presented a plaque to Highlandtown Community Health Center, part of Baltimore Medical System, for their outstanding fluoride varnish application rate of 79 percent during well-child visits.

“In February 2007, a 12-year-old Maryland boy died from a brain infection caused by an untreated tooth abscess. No child should die from tooth decay,” said Interim Commissioner Farrow. “The Pediatric Dental Fluoride Varnish Program has proven to be an important public health intervention for Baltimore’s children.”

In November 2007, the Health Department, with funding from five private foundations, implemented The Pediatric Dental Fluoride Varnish Program, a partnership with the University of Maryland Dental School and Baltimore Healthcare Access. Pediatric providers from six Baltimore City clinics where Medicaid recipients are regularly treated were trained to apply varnish every four to six months to children between the ages of 12 to 36 months. Pilot sites included an academic center, four community health centers and a private practitioner.

At the end of 19 months, over 3,000 low-income Baltimore City children received fluoride varnish. Clinics reported 58 percent of eligible children received varnish during a well-child

visit. Children with cavities or oral abnormalities requiring follow-up care were referred to a dentist.

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) recently designated Baltimore City's Pediatric Dental Fluoride Varnish Program as a *Promising Practice* with the potential of becoming a Model Public Health Program. In July, the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) instituted the *Maryland's Mouths Matter: Fluoride Varnish and Oral Health Screening Program for Kids Program*.

"Because this child population too often is not seen by dentists, it provides an opportunity for medical practitioners to conduct a routine dental cavities risk assessment at a critical time of these children's dental growth," said Dr. Harry Goodman, director of the Office of Oral Health at DHMH.

To read more information about the Baltimore City Pediatric Dental Fluoride Varnish Program, please visit <http://www.baltimorehealth.org/fluoridevarnish> or call Cat Chamberlain at 410-396-6903, or Maria Mayzel at 443-984-2626.

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