

I-Smile@School is a preventive school-based dental program in Iowa dedicated to improving the oral health of children across the state. Led by the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), I-Smile@School services are provided through public and private non-profit organizations who administer Iowa's Title V Child Health program. Public health dental hygienists provide dental screenings, risk assessments, and the application of dental sealants, fluoride varnish, and silver diamine fluoride for students in elementary and middle schools that have a rate of 40% or higher free or reduced lunch program participation. In addition to clinical services, the program emphasizes oral health education for classrooms and individually for students.



I-Smile@School also includes care coordination, encouraging regular dental visits and connecting children with restorative treatment when decay is identified. Working alongside community partners, the I-Smile@School hygienists and their teams help ensure that all children, particularly those at greatest risk, have access to essential, affordable preventive dental care.

School-Based Oral Health Data

15,723 Children Received an Oral Screening

32,756 Sealants were placed

27% had untreated decay

47% received dental sealants

Partnership Spotlight with Crawford County Community Health

In 2024, Crawford County Community Health identified an opportunity to expand preventive dental care by introducing use of silver diamine fluoride (SDF) in a school within its service area. In the fall, dental hygienists began identifying children who had tooth decay and could benefit from SDF, a treatment proven to halt the progression of decay. School nurses and teachers helped secure parent consent for the SDF application and educated families on its benefits.



Since December 2024, 37 students have received SDF application. Building on this momentum, the agency has since implemented quarterly clinics to apply SDF at the local public health office. This model enables consent forms to be sent home when decay is identified during I-Smile@School visits, with students scheduled the following month for SDF treatment once parent/guardian consent is obtained.

Challenge: Consent Return

One of the ongoing challenges for the I-Smile @ School program is consent form return. Without signed consent from parents or guardians, students are unable to receive oral screenings and other preventive dental services. To address this barrier, the program implemented an incentive evaluation in early 2025 to determine whether offering incentives to students and/or school staff could improve consent form return rates. Initial data shows that schools receiving incentives reported increased participation, demonstrating the effectiveness of this approach. These insights will help guide future efforts, including incentives provided by HHS, to enhance outreach and engagement strategies, ensuring more students have access to preventive oral health services.

Success: I-Smile@ School Reach

I-Smile@School provided services in 95 of Iowa's 99 counties. Schools in four counties were served by another program or did not have schools that qualified for I-Smile@School services.

