



Information about sealants

Most tooth decay (dental cavities) starts on the chewing surfaces of the back teeth.¹ As the back teeth develop, pits and grooves form on the top of the teeth. Food and germs that cause decay get caught in the grooves and cause cavities. Tooth brushing can't reach into the grooves completely, allowing the germs to hide. Dental sealants are thin plastic coatings that are painted onto the chewing surfaces of the back teeth. There, the sealant hardens into a shield that protects the pits and grooves and prevents cavities. The covered pits and fissures give a smooth surface for brushing and generally last several years. Sealants are probably one of the most underused tools we have in fighting tooth decay in our children; together with regular dental checkups and cleanings, application of topical fluoride and good home care and nutrition, sealants are a vital part of helping to ensure a lifetime of good oral health.

How are sealants applied?

The dentist or dental hygienist gently rubs the tooth surfaces with a conditioning solution. After a minute, this is washed off and the tooth is dried with air to help the sealant stick to the tooth. The sealant is then painted on the chewing surfaces. The sealant bonds to the tooth and hardens, sometimes with the help of a special light, to create its protective shield. Sealants are painless. There is little or no drilling. Sealants usually take about 5 minutes or less per tooth to apply. Once they harden, normal activities and eating is fine. Sometimes the sealants will appear to wear away and disappear, but they usually continue to protect deep within the tooth. After they have been applied, your child's dentist or dental hygienist should check from time to time to ensure that the sealant is still intact and in place.

When should sealants be applied?

Sealants can first be applied when your child starts getting the first permanent molars (back teeth), about age 6 or 7. Later, at about age 11 or 12, sealants can be applied to the second molars as they come in.

How much do sealants cost?

Depending on your benefit program, sealants are usually covered as a preventive service. Preventive services usually require little or no member out-of-pocket costs.

Why use dental sealants?

- They prevent decay and save the child from future cavities and fillings.
- They save time spent at the dental office.
- They save you from potentially costly dental bills.
- They have been proven safe and effective for more than two decades.
- Together with regular dental checkups and cleanings, application of topical fluoride and good home care and nutrition, sealants can help to ensure a lifetime of good oral health for your child.²

¹ Beltran-Aguliar, ED et al, Surveillance for dental caries, dental sealants, tooth retention, edentulism, and enamel fluorosis—United States, 1988-1994 and 1999-2002. *MMWR Surveill Summ.* 2005 Aug 26;54(3):1-43.

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2000 Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General. Rockville, MD National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research.

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