Dental Sealants



# What are dental sealants?

The American Dental Association recommends dental sealants as a safe and effective way to prevent cavities. Dental sealants are thin plastic coatings that cover the surfaces of teeth. The sealant protects the tooth surfaces and helps keep germs and food particles out of the grooved surfaces of the teeth. Sealants are usually placed on the back teeth (the molars) because most dental decay occurs on the chewing surface of teeth and molars are more vulnerable to decay because they are the teeth primarily used for chewing. A dentist may seal other teeth in addition to the molars if he thinks a particular tooth needs extra protection.

# Why are dental sealants important?

Sealants prevent cavities and can protect teeth from damage caused by tooth decay (cavities).

# How are sealants applied?

Applying sealants is a short and easy process that is both safe and painless. After the tooth is cleaned, a special gel is placed on the chewing surface for a few seconds. The tooth is then washed off and dried, the sealant is painted on the chewing surface of the tooth, and a light is shined on the tooth to quickly harden the sealant. It only takes a minute for the sealant to form a protective shield.

# What do they look like?

Sealants can be clear, white or slightly tinted and can only be seen up close; they are not seen when a child talks or smiles.

# Can my child feel them?

A child may feel the sealant with their tongue for the first few days, especially because it is new in their mouth. That sensation will disappear after a few days.

# How long will it last?

A sealant can last up to 10 years. Your dentist will check the sealant’s strength at your regular appointments and will reapply as needed.

# Who needs dental sealants?

Everyone benefits from dental sealants, but it is most common to have sealants applied during childhood. Children are especially vulnerable to tooth decay. Tooth decay typically affects 50% of all children aged 12-15, but only 1 in 5 children have dental sealants.1 The proposed Healthy People 2020 objective is to increase the proportion of children with dental sealants on their molar teeth.2

# When is my child at risk?

The first set of permanent molars typically come in when a child is 5-7 years old, and second molar eruptions usually take place at 11-14 years old. Dental sealants should be applied as soon as these teeth erupt.

# What are the benefits of school-based dental sealant programs?

* These programs increase access to quality services, especially for vulnerable children who are least likely to receive primary dental care;
* Sealants are effective in reducing occurrence of cavities;
* Sealants benefit everyone through coverage in grades 2 and 6 regardless of a family’s income level;3
* Sealants’ benefits outweigh a potential loss of follow-up in school-based programs; and
* No special methods are needed to brush sealed teeth.

# Additional Information may be found from:

* The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at <https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth>
* The American Dental Association at <https://www.ada.org/>

1CDC, *Oral health: Preventing cavities, gum disease, and tooth loss*, 2009. [www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/publications/aag/doh.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/publications/aag/doh.htm)

2Healthy People 2020.[www.healthypeople.gov](http://www.healthypeople.gov)

3Gooch, B.F. et al., *Preventing dental caries through school-based sealant programs*, 2009. <http://jada.ada.org/cgi/content/abstract/140/11/1356>