

Dental Sealant Information for Patients

What are dental sealants?

Dental sealants are thin plastic coatings which are applied to the chewing surfaces of the bicuspid molars and molars. Most tooth decay in children and adults occurs in these surfaces. Sealants cover the chewing surfaces to prevent decay.

What are the benefits of sealants?

Sealants create a protective coating on the tooth preventing decay in areas where cavities most often occur. Because sealants can prevent more than 80% of dental decay in children and adults, they reduce the need for more invasive and expensive treatment like fillings or crowns. The effectiveness of dental sealants in the prevention of tooth decay has been demonstrated in a variety of research findings. In the last several years, studies have repeatedly demonstrated that protection is 100% on the biting surface of the teeth that remain completely sealed. Further, the American Dental Association recommends dental sealants on all permanent and primary teeth to prevent tooth decay.

How are sealants applied?

First the dentist or dental hygienist cleans the teeth with a special liquid that prepares the tooth surface. The dental sealant is then painted on the tooth, filling in the grooves and creating a physical barrier which protects the tooth. A special curing light is used to cure and bond the sealant to the tooth once it is in place.

Which teeth are suitable for sealants?

All teeth are susceptible to cavities caused by bacteria. All teeth with grooves (usually those in the back of the mouth) benefit from dental sealants. It is best if the sealant is applied soon after the teeth have erupted, before the teeth have a chance to get a cavity.



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How long will sealants last?

One sealant application can last for as long as 5 to 10 years. Sealants should be checked regularly, and reapplied if they are no longer in place.

Will sealants replace fluoride?

No. Fluorides, such as those used in community water, and toothpaste also help to prevent decay. Fluoride works best on the smooth surfaces of teeth. The chewing surfaces on the back teeth, however, have tiny grooves where cavities often form. Sealants keep bacteria out of the grooves by covering them with a safe coating. Sealants and fluorides work together to prevent tooth decay.